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SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

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BARRY N. MALZBERG
with "Anderson"—
who is he?

J. RAY DETTLING
An imaginative look at
"Tomorrow's Amazing
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"Marooned on Veeta"
Asimov's first story
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SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

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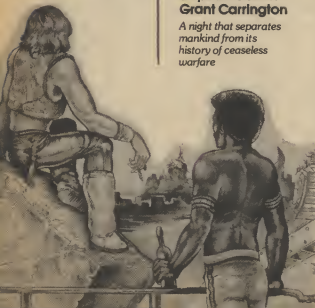
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opinion

THERE IS NOT far from where I live a science-fiction/fantasy bookstore run by sensitive, intelligent people whom I like a good deal. They carry almost everything that's in print in our field, and a nice selection of old and rare items besides, and I enjoy dropping in there, shooting the breeze with the proprietors and their employees, picking up interesting new books or magazines, keeping an eye on the way my own books are selling, and so on and so on. It's a cozy place, practically an sf clubhouse for the local crowd, and I usually run into one or two other writers when I'm in there.

There's only one thing wrong with it for me. The good people who operate it have a hit list of books they don't approve of. They refuse to stock them. They tack up pages of the offending books on the wall to display the offensive passages.

Notice that I said it's a hit list of books *they don't approve of*. I don't mean to say that they refuse to stock books they don't like. The people who run this bookstore are folks of taste and discrimination, and if they were to weed from their stock all the science-fiction and fantasy that they thought was junk, they'd have a much emptier bookstore. But the books that they shun are turned away on—well, moral grounds.

As far as I know, there are three items on the current Index Librorum Prohibitorum at this bookshop. One is a lengthy series of science-fantasy adventure novels set on some alien planet where the women seem to enjoy being enslaved and chained by men. I haven't read the books (or any others on the forbidden list) but I gather that they are full of juicy sado-masochistic passages in which the women admire the bulging muscles of their masculine overlords as they wait eagerly for the whip to

descend.

Junk? Very likely. Sick? Maybe.

The second series of books also apparently has a sado-masochistic theme in which women enjoy getting knocked around, although evidently it is not nearly so central to the plots. The author of these books is a woman—I know her, and she doesn't seem at all sick or weird to me—and her work is respected by people whose taste I respect, so it came as a surprise to me that her books were being classed on a par with the notorious other series I mentioned above.

The third forbidden item has nothing at all sordid in it, I gather. It's a thick, long, highly publicized imitation of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* rolled into a single volume—one of the many such items that were published a few years back. The bookstore people seem to feel that this one goes beyond imitation into down-right plagiarism, and they piously refuse to carry any book that so flagrantly invades the copyright of the saintly Tolkien. The kicker here is that neither the Tolkien family nor the various publishers of the Tolkien books have taken any action to prevent the publication and repeated re-issuing of this so-called plagiarism. In fact, the paperback publisher of the derivative novel is *the same company that issues Tolkien's books in the United States*. Are we to believe that they are conspiring in the ripping off of one of their own most popular authors?

The issue here, I think, is a very serious one. The profession of bookseller is a high calling, a sacred vocation: people have been burned at the stake for printing and selling books, although not, apparently, lately. The bookseller is the custodian of printed word and the conduit through which ideas reach the public. If the book-

seller chooses to throttle an idea, some of our freedom is impaired.

I ought to state my own bias here. I am neither a whipper of women nor a devoted reader of books in which women get whipped. Given my choice, I would marginally prefer doing the whipping to getting whipped myself, but neither concept is any kind of turn-on for me. I think one of the series of banned books is surely trash, and I have no opinion about the other. As for the imitation Tolkien, I have no interest in that either, have never bought or read a single book of that type, have not, in fact, ever bothered to read the Tolkien books themselves. So it is not any special pleading of my own that is involved here.

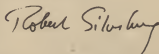
But the censorship of books by booksellers does strike right to my center. And censorship is what this is, even though the people doing it are nice folks and the books they are banning are, mostly or entirely, garbage. One person's garbage is another person's classic. It is not up to the bookseller to make the distinction for the customer. A shop that specializes in science-fiction and fantasy is, by definition, limiting its stock; such a shop is under no obligation to carry mystery stories or investment handbooks or books that tell you how to spay your own cat. But when that bookshop starts drawing the line *within the sf/fantasy field*, tossing this book or that off the shelves because it is morally or politically unacceptable, it is, in its tiny way, setting us on the road to the Third Reich. I'm not overstating my belief. Once the banning of books begins, there's no end to it short of the Final Solution. If we throw out books in which the heroes are nasty to women, the next step is to dump Conan the Conquerer, who is nasty to everyone, and then perhaps John Carter of Mars, who is nasty to colored people (they're green or red, but it's the same thing, isn't it?) and then—and then—

It's not a *reductio ad absurdum*. Right now in this country we have a bunch calling themselves the Moral Majority who would like to tell you what to read and to prevent you from reading anything that doesn't support the values they believe in. I can't see any distinction between Moral Majority censorship of books that advo-

cate free love or homosexuality and my local bookstore's censorship of books that advocate the whipping and chaining of women. Samuel R. Delany's *Dhalgren*, which my bookstore sells happily, is full of sexual acts that would appall the Moral Majority and that most of us would hesitate to commit also. But it is sold. The other books are shown the door. It's a matter of whose ox is gored, I guess.

Censorship of any kind gores *my* ox. I wonder how much of this stuff is going on in the science-fiction bookstores across the land. Maybe less of it than I think; the bookstore of which I speak is located in a city famous for its radical political views and its outspokenness on social issues, and perhaps that accounts for its unwillingness to stock books that advocate slavery of women, which is currently an unpopular concept in that city. (But pseudo-plagiarism, so far as I know, is not a political issue there.) It may merely be the celebrated political intensity of the local environment that leads the owners to ban legitimately published books by reputable authors that happen to concern themselves with repellent and disagreeable human interactions.

I've discussed all this with the proprietors. They see my point, after a fashion, and justify themselves by saying that the books in question, after all, are on sale at half a dozen other bookstores within a ten-minute walk. I don't think that's good enough. I think we each need to live as though we are the defining case of all of humanity; and when any bookseller, especially enlightened and intelligent ones like these, starts banning books, it's bad news for civilization.



SPECTACLES FOR SPECTACULAR NUMBERS

googol goggles

—Peter Payack

The Genesis Fraud

IF THE NAMES Moore, Morris, and Gish mean nothing to you—

If you've never heard of a *baramin*—

If you think the Creation Research Society* is a genetic-engineering firm—

—then you've been missing out on some of the most extraordinary science fiction of the last dozen years. It's a new genre, called "scientific creationism" by its creators, but classed as straight fantasy by most observers. Creationism's legion of devout fans includes the famous and infamous both: Jerry Falwell, Ronald Reagan, the Arkansas legislature.

The most novel feature of creationism is the way all its leading writers use the same alternative universe—one in which evolution is a null word, the earth is 10,000 years old, and the universe was supernaturally created in six solar days. The creationist writers have taken a unique approach to advertising, promoting their imaginary world before school boards, in courtrooms, and at legislative hearings. These performances earn them considerable attention, albeit with mixed reviews.

This could all be very entertaining, in a cheeky sort of way, except for two little problems. Most of the fans—and apparently some of the writers—don't realize that they're dealing with fiction. What's more, they're eager to force the rest of us to become fans, too.

Even now, at what I hope (but doubt) is the height of their ascendancy, I have trouble taking the creationists seriously. Evolution is the most significant idea in biology. As the late geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky pointed out, "Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution." And evolution has gone far beyond the point where whether one "believes in it" is a valid question. It is generally recognized as a fact, a basic oper-

ating principle of the Earth's biosphere. And as someone (Pogo?) said, "Facts is facts. You can't have opinions about facts."

So what's going on?

Quite a bit, actually. In recent years, creationists have:

—fought a running battle to add creationism to state science curricula, especially in California and Texas;

—frightened many textbook publishers into weakening, shortening, or eliminating the treatment of evolution in their books;

—sued the National Science Foundation and the Smithsonian Institute in an attempt to get equal money/display space for creationism;

—introduced (and in two cases passed) over 33 bills calling for public school science classes to give creationism equal billing in texts, lectures, library work, audiovisuals—the works. (The 1973 Tennessee law was found unconstitutional—the 1981 Arkansas law still stands at this writing.)

That's a partial list, but you get the flavor. Having utterly failed to make a convincing case within the scientific community, the creationists are appealing the decision to the public arena—where passion, power, and pressure can cover up the many gaping holes in their reasoning.

Let's face it—Americans go crazy over the word "equal". We like to think of our country as a hotbed of egalitarianism (whether it is or not is not at issue here). The creationists are smart—they know what buttons to push. *Fairness. Equality.* And while we're at it, let's give astrology equal time with astronomy, and test the

Michael P. Kube-McDowell's first published story, "Antithesis", appeared in Amazing two years ago and he is now well established as a free-lance writer of science fiction and fact. He holds an MA in science education with a thesis on creationism, has taught middle-school science for five years and is an "ardent rationalist".

Michael P. Kube-McDowell

kids on both. Let's bring the American Natural Hygiene Society into health classes and doctors' offices to explain how immunization is harmful and germs don't cause disease.

Equal time? *Not without equal merit!*

It's the religious angle that makes otherwise rational people tiptoe around creationism. Members of the CRS hold the Bible to be absolutely infallible in its theology, moral philosophy, history, and science. Satan is given credit for the concept of evolution. Evolution is given the blame for, among other things, racism, the sexual revolution, communism, the UFO craze, facism, "streaking", and the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

What must be recognized is that the creationists are as far off the beaten track theologically as they are scientifically. The vast majority of Bible scholars agree that Genesis is a combination of at least three oral traditions, and not the work of Moses. The vast majority of Christian denominations have managed to make peace with Darwin without doing violence to their belief in a Deity. (Some of the most vigorous opposition to equal-time bills has come from clergymen and theologians!)

But the creationists seem to take a kind of perverse pride in their minority status, as if it confirms just how much we need them to save us from ourselves. All the talk about academic freedom and equality serves as a smokescreen to disguise the true nature of the creationists' campaign. This is a jihad, a crusade, a Holy War. They're out to repossess the land (their own words)—from the evolutionists, the humanists, the atheists. If they have to rewrite science and silence the rationalists to do it, they will.

Science is not atheistic. At most, it's agnostic—God, by most definitions of Him/Her, is simply outside its province. Supernatural causes and testimonial evidence are *verboden*. Appeals to authority or human vanity must be excluded. Science tries to describe the world as it is, not as we wish it were.

At the same time, I can't imagine a good social studies education—in school or out—that doesn't take a close look at the beliefs of the major world religions, and

at the role those beliefs have played in politics, philosophy, and ethics.

But the creationists want more than that. They want preaching, not teaching. They want to convert, not to convince. They have the Answers, and they're willing to censor dissenters to save them.

And unless we take them seriously, they just might pull it off.

**John N. Moore, coeditor of the creationist journal and HS biology text; Henry M. Marris, director of the Institute for Creation Research, San Diego; Duane T. Gish, associate director of the ICR; a baramin is a "created kind" (creationists retreated from saying that all species were separately created); the CRS (founded 1963) has 600 voting members (must have advanced degree in natural science and sign a Statement of Faith in special creation and a worldwide flood).*

What can you do?

Monitor your school system. If evolution is being watered down or ignored (a decision usually made quietly and out of fear), demand better texts, better teachers, and/or more courageous teaching. If evolution is still alive and well, encourage the development of a policy statement and a complaint-handling procedure—because a challenge is almost sure to come.

Monitor letters to your state and federal legislators, letting them know you're apposed to equal-time laws. (They really *do* read them!)

Join or support organizations who have taken on the task of opposing the creationists in court. The American Civil Liberties Union successfully opposed a creationist high school text's adaptation in Indiana, and will challenge the Arkansas equal-time law; you can help with a check c/a Jack Navik, 132 West 43rd Street, NY NY 10036. ●

The Interstellar Connection

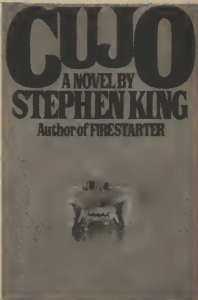
Tom Stalcar

Cujo by Stephen King (Viking, hardcover, \$13.95). It would be nearly impossible to avoid finding out that Stephen King is the reigning master of contemporary horror fiction. His novels *Carrie*, *The Shining*, *The Dead Zone* and the rest have sold in the tens of millions and the film adaptations of King's books have built an audience that is the envy of writers all over America.

Knowing this about him, you know that his new book *Cujo* is a book filled with blood and gore in the most explicit manner, and that the end result of your deliberately masochistic desire to read *Cujo* in its entirety will involve what H.P. Lovecraft called "a profound sense of dread." If you are the kind of person who will be distressed by reading about people you care about getting hurt badly, and if you will not relish the thought of having nightmare flashbacks days after reading the novel, then avoid *Cujo*.

This leaves several million King fans to read what is one of the most gripping and riveting novels of the modern era. *Cujo* has an intensity and a power of imagery that make it as good an entertainment investment as any film, and a sense of human universality which involves one's emotions so strongly that it is necessary to remind ourselves that it is merely fiction and that the people are not really our friends or loved ones.

King achieves an uncanny sense of verisimilitude in his characters. We all know that a housewife and mother like Donna Trenton exists in a place like rural Castle Rock, Maine. We can believe that she is afraid of getting older as she passes thirty and that she has a lonely life knowing that her husband Vic is away at work in his



public relations firm and her son Tad, age four, will soon be in school instead of the nursery school he now attends. We also know that losers like Steve Kemp take advantage of such women's fears and needs, and nurse their immature macho self-esteem by brief flings with them. We can believe that such men actually do not like women at all and that they can be capable of cruelty and savagery.

The people in *Cujo* seem to have had existences before and after the novel's events. It is true that Sheriff Bannerman appeared in *The Dead Zone* and is back in *Cujo*, but that doesn't explain it. The people in this book live ordinary lives, eating foods with real brand-names and going to places that seem to have a true existence somewhere in rural Maine. King knows just how much mundane detail to sprinkle here and there in his writings and precisely when and how to spring his awful surprises on us.

I won't spoil any of the terrifying and dread-filled surprise moments awaiting you in *Cujo*. Suffice it to say that innocence is no guard against impending evil and the prayers of good people are not always answered in *Cujo* or in real life.

Once King hooks you into caring about what happens to the people of Castle Rock, you will be urged forward with a feeling of compulsion to read to the end. If you end up with sweaty palms, a dry feeling in your throat, and rather unsteady legs as you stand up after finishing *Cujo*, don't blame Stephen King.

Paperbacks, U.S.A.: A Graphic History, 1939-1959 by Piet Schreuders *Blue Dolphin Books, Pacific Comics, Suite E, 4487 Ronson Court, San Diego, CA 92111, paperback, \$10.95.* If you have any interest in paperback collecting, or if you want to see where today's mass market paperbacks came from, this profusely illustrated book is the place to go. Using the inside stories of famous and not-so-famous cover artists, and thousands of color and black-and-white covers, this book takes us behind the scenes at the origins of paperback publishing. On page 69 you can even see a reproduction of the cover of the very first sf anthology (Donald A. Wollheim's *The Pocket Book of Science Fiction*). Covering mysteries and other categories as well as sf and horror, the volume contains much of the history of today's best-known paperback publishers as well as being a good art book.

The War Hound and the World's Pain by Michael Moorcock (*Timescape, hardcover, \$12.95*). An exception to the usual heroic fantasy novel, this one is not limited to action-adventure. It belongs rather among the select few religious and philosophical inquiry. Our genres are supposed to be the vehicles of unbridled thought of that nature and it is good to see that Moorcock is willing to transcend any self-imposed pulp magazine limitations in a book like this one.

The narrator is mercenary soldier Graf Ulrich von Bek, who travels across Europe during the Thirty Years' War. Opening in 1631, the novel tells of his meeting with a beautiful dark-haired woman with whom he falls in love, and of the mysterious castle and devastated and deserted forest where nothing is alive. The castle turns out to be the domain of Satan, desperate to be brought back into communication and union with God after his fall from grace.

This is made acceptable to the reader by the fact that Bek is an intelligent and independent soldier who is totally skeptical about the supernatural. As he becomes convinced of the existence of Satan, so do we. Bek's quest and his important reason for making it are the basis for the rest of the novel and we are shown several instances of religious questioning within the context of the actions of characters. This is where the novel is at its thought-provoking best.

Moorcock researched the history and lifestyles of people during the 1630's in order to create a believable foundation for the religious questions. Jews are routinely blamed for bad luck in the tiny German villages, and are murdered in their sleep. Common people live futile and miserable lives at the whim of lords and armies, and with few choices to make. Women who seek knowledge and talk among themselves about this are singled out and burned as witches. Young people are forced into the armies serving one or another religious leader, often within the same Christian religious denomination, and then must violate their religious teachings and lose their souls in order to please a Pope or cardinal. Moorcock asks: is God or Satan the master of the terrible suffering of innocent mankind? Can people of limited power be held accountable in Hell for doing what their lords or religious rulers told them to do? Whatever the answers, Moorcock's book is the type which people of all faiths (and lack of faith) should read and evaluate.

The Annotated Tales of Edgar Allan Poe, edited by Stephen Peithman (*Doubleday, hardcover, \$35.00*). The price is steep for the average person but this book should be on the shelves of every library. A massive and beautiful volume and a joy to glance through or read with full attention, it presents the definitive versions of all the Poe stories along with hundreds of illustrations, many of them from rare early appearances of the stories in newspapers, magazines, and books.

Stephen Peithman annotated the stories, adding supplementary information and explanations which greatly enhance

the reading of the text. We are given background on the vehicles, devices, cities, terms, and so on. Etchings, sketches, and paintings illustrate the stories, which are arranged by type rather than chronology.

This book is a genuine delight. As a fan of Poe I was excited to receive this nearly 3-inch thick, oversized volume of Poe's writings. Suggest that your local library purchase this one.

The Annotated Gulliver's Travels

by Jonathan Swift, edited by Isaac Asimov (Clarkston Potter, hardcover, \$19.95; SF Book Club, \$14.99). One of the earliest examples of science fiction, *Gulliver's Travels* contains much that young children miss when they read it. Isaac Asimov painlessly fills us in on the important background elements which went into the writing of this major work of satire. He plots the location Gulliver would have reached had he sailed in the direction implied in the book. He calculates the tons of urine which the tiny Lilliputians sought to avoid as the bound Gulliver turned on his side to urinate. Asimov's wit and wide-ranging knowledge of physics, history, geography, and the customs of various societies are nowhere more evident than in this annotated version of *Gulliver's Travels*. Not simply for scholars, this is a book for everyone to enjoy.

More Wandering Stars: Outstanding Stories of Jewish Fantasy and Science Fiction, edited by Jack Dann

(Doubleday, hardcover, \$10.95). Like the outstanding *Wandering Stars* (1974) this anthology contains old and new stories which represent the range of Jewish humor, allegory, and storytelling within the field of sf and fantasy. Introduced by Asimov, the book contains tales by Ellison, Malzberg, Haldeman, and others, including one story each by Woody Allen and Isaac Bashevis Singer.

The Golem Remembered, 1909-1980: Variations of a Jewish Legend, by Arnold L. Goldsmith (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, Michigan 48202, hardcover, \$15.95). Those of you who are not Jewish might not have heard

of the golem, the legendary creature supposedly fashioned out of clay by Rabbi Loew in Prague in 1580. A large effigy of a man, the golem came to life and was said to come back to protect any Jew in trouble. Out of control, the golem could kill those who kill Jews.

The story has been retold in several films, plays, novels, and short stories, even becoming a Marvel and DC comic character. In an entertaining and informal way, Goldsmith takes us on a tour of the various versions of the golem story and gives us his opinion of why the golem has appeal even today. The Frankenstein monster, berserk robots, and even all-knowing computers had their origins in the golem legend, in that they represent knowledge out of control in the form of mankind's creations. ●

Staicar, 34, lives with his wife Joy in Ann Arbor, MI, where he is supervisor in the Interlibrary Loan Office and selector of sf acquisitions for the University of Michigan Graduate Library. An avid reader of sf since the age of 10, Staicar has written about it for such magazines as Writer's Digest, Today's Student, Science Fiction Review and The Twilight Zone Magazine. He is also SF General Editor for the Frederick Ungar Publishing Co.'s Recognitions series of books about science fiction. Ungar will also be publishing his book on Fritz Leiber.

SOCKET TO US!

Wizardly frizardly

Thomas A. Edison

Warned that electrical

Shocks might deter

Use of such power and,

Currentlyrately,

Most of us find that they

Monthly occur!

—John D. Seats

intercom

An Open Letter to George R.R. Martin
Dear George:

Your story, "Unsound Variations", presented in our January, 1982 issue was a brilliant piece which has received much praise already. However, it contained some unforgivable production botches the likes of which cause everyone concerned nightmares. I sincerely apologize for these as it is my responsibility to see that things like this do not happen. In addition, I strongly urge everyone to be sure and read this and other stories collected in a new volume entitled *Unsound Variations* recently released by Ace.

Sincerely,
Elinor Mavor
Editor

Dear Ms. Mavor:

I just finished reading Marvin Kaye's article in the November *Amazing*, and I have some thoughts to share on the theme of alienating oneself from one's society in order to change it.

The whole idea is strictly in the realm of fantasy. The examples cited positively in the essay (Frodo and CE3K) both presume that either the world or the person alienated can be significantly altered by Other Powers (for better or worse). What about real life, where this magnification seems never to be present to clarify things?

At this moment I myself sit in a town in an alternate universe. I have selected a life for myself that seems to have preserved the elements of alienation within the outward appearance of acceptance. I am frightened by the result.

I grew up in a pattern of alienation. Almost all of the things I worshipped as a youth wound up betraying me, leaving me naked and alone at each stage of my growth. Each time this happened I was so frightened I simply cloaked myself in a dream of another world. There was nothing brave about it. Eventually, I would be be-

trayed again.

At some point it became clear that in this process I had never asked an essential question: "What do I want?" In examining alternatives, it became obvious that there weren't any ready-made solutions. Despite the best that pampering could do, my life remained fraught with anxieties and fears.

So I began to construct an alternative universe.

Of course at first this was just in my head. I would imagine what I felt to be an ideal set of values, and test them out. Some worked and some turned to stone. But by trial and error, I eventually discovered the formula for actually constructing my own alternate universe. I have been hard at work on it for two years now, and as I mentioned earlier I have the pleasure of currently residing in a town in my alternate world. I even have a job here, but that mostly keeps me in bed and board while I'm checking out the real possibilities. The job is quite similar to one in your world, which provides a nice transition and preserves my sanity amid the changes.

I did have to leave some very important things behind—the problem with an alternate universe is that it is a very private thing. The choosing and selecting are based on my unique and powerful set of frustrations and disappointments, with the new world built out of all of those fragments of space in the old universe that remained between the misfit of myself and the reality I perceived. Among those left behind are very important personal friends struggling to come to terms with that same reality. Harder still was leaving behind a lover whose heart seemed closer to me at times than my own.

It is very hard to forget these people. Still, I have found here the very satisfaction I expected: beauty of the physical environment, a friendly people, kindness beyond my experience. But I am not really at home in this dream: the past is part and parcel of the present. All of that garbage I lived by

for all of those years still abides. It lurks in the depths of my awareness like a monster: a grey, dirty gore-dripping apparition that stands beside the strong, rugged beauty of this place. Now that I am here, now that the majority of my hopes have born fruit, I stand sullied, undeserving of my own efforts. Like the cigarette smoker I cannot taste or smell much of the beauty that surrounds and would suffuse me: I am polluted.

This is something Kaye ignores: we do not grow up in vacuums. The hero of literature is often naive, something the real world-shaker can never be. To leave this mortal mess for one that is more splendid and human is not only the act of leaving: it is also the act of arriving. And in the real world, the power to change comes from within.

(I do not say this to disparage fantasy, by the way: in my own case the clarity that fantasy makes possible sustains me in the pursuit of real-world strength and beauty.)

Having arrived in this new world, one chosen with care as an adult and thus one much more suited to my needs than the desperate choices of adolescence, I would have seen only my beaming face, been vaguely aware of my disillusionment with my past and my hope for the future. Perhaps, if that person were sensitive, they would have participated in some way in the intensity of that present, that instant of change that stood poised between the potentially crushing powers of an oppressingly evil past and a promising, benevolent future.

But at that point I became by definition alone. Now there is no one to share with, for I am an alien. My new world fits almost exactly the set of expectations that helped create it in my life, but I am in no sense a part of it. The very rootedness that is an essential ingredient of this place excludes me for a long, long time.

I have stressed this dichotomy between the purchase of a new world through experience, and the dream of a new world, at the expense of naming some of the pleasures that followed. I take much more than a passing joy in my new home. There is a personal place for me here, and despite my cursed upbringing I have found some

lonely but exquisite places to charm my soul. I am still a misfit, but this is a place that has welcomed and accepted many misfits: Alaska.

Ron Wodaski
Sitka, AK

P.S. In re-reading this, I realized that it is your fine publication that got these thoughts churning and helped me verbalize them. Whether or not they actually constitute a proper "letter to the editor," I'm sending them along in recognition of the kind of effect sincere editorial efforts can have. Thanks.

Thank you for a most interesting letter. You seem to be oscillating between feeling you are a victim and feeling that you have the power to build your own life. I think you are on the right track, taking responsibility for your own experiences and creating a positive universe for yourself. As the process becomes clear to you, maybe you can let go of the negative feelings that deter you from fulfillment. —EM

Dear Mr. Bernhard:

My reason for writing is to say a personal thank you for what has been done with the magazine since you became its publisher.

From what I can gather from a variety of folks, you took over publishing chores at a time when *Amazing's* reputation was at a low ebb and you rebuilt it back into a classy magazine. I've worked with your staff which, while it may be small, seems most professional and dedicated; I was favorably impressed by Elinor Mavor even back when I thought she was Omar Gohagen.

I guess I'm simply trying to say thanks for saving *Amazing* and keeping it viable, after all these years and after it had fallen on relatively bad times. I hope whoever you find to succeed you can be as successful.

Best wishes,

Paul Dellinger
Wytheville, VA

Dear Ms. Mavor;

I have been reading *Amazing* off and on for several years now and just wanted to write to compliment all concerned on the excellent January, 1982 issue. From the

cover art by Robert Petillo to the great short story by "newcomer" Steven Daugherty, the magazine sparked. I particularly liked the story by Daugherty. His slightly cynical satire of the future of the public networks and their insatiable appetite for ratings seems to me to be right on target.

Stories like "Comnet 2 Enters The 21st Century" can serve as a conscience for us all and hopefully prevent further degrading of the public airwaves. I would like to take longer to expound on this subject but I've got to stop now so I can catch a rerun of "Let's Make A Deal". It's my favorite—this guy gives up \$2,500 in favor of curtain #2 only to find he has "won" a pregnant Aardvark and 50 gallons of Rustoleum. Well, to paraphrase Laser Eddie, "it's his butt".

Sincerely,

Stuart A Napier, Jr.
Richmond, VA

Dear Editor,

I've been reading your November issue, and, just for once, I feel really sad. For the last six issues or so, I've had to forcibly repress the urge to dash out into the streets and buttonhole every passerby I meet and force them to read such splendid stories as "Run Spot Run!", "The Nose-pickers of Dawr" and everything by Wayne Wightman. Why then is it that this month I want to win the football pools so that I can buy up the entire issue and dump every single copy in the sea so that no innocent will ever have to suffer my disappointment?

Is it perhaps because my expectations have been raised with each issue so that after six doses I've come to expect the impossible high or is it just that you've actually achieved the impossible and come up with a dud issue?

Or is it just for the moment our respective orbits have temporarily diverged so that in the near future we will be on the same wavelengths again?

Or is it simply that not enough of the really up-and-coming young wordsmiths are taking up your really tremendous offer of a copy of your editorial requirements in exchange for a miserable little self-ad-

dressed envelope?

Hoping to hear from you soon,

C.L. Tomkins
Middlesex, England

Sorry for the orbital divergence, but we can't expect to mesh 100% of the time. Keep on reading! —EM

Dear A.B.,

I am pleased with the content of *Amazing* since the Change, and I don't mind the size of print. But the cover art leaves me cold. I think sales might well climb if your front covers were more attractive. Some of them don't even look like sf magazine covers. September, for instance. I realize that the magazine is combined with *Fantastic* now, but I don't know, just from looking, what the hell the cover is about. The rear cover would have been better for the front cover than the front cover was. Many people buy a magazine from the cover, from the art and the names on the front. First impressions are vital. Please take this paragraph for what it is: concerned constructive criticism. I'd hate to see *Amazing* go under, ever. It's more than a magazine; it's an institution. And, in my bytheway opinion, the finest of the sf magazines for a long time. *Amazing* has been the best of the lot for a long time. It's always had more personality and soul than the others. Hang on to that, please.

Faithfully,

Charles (C.J.) Wilson
Gwynneville, IN

We get such a variety of opinion on cover art it would be impossible to please everyone. The Miller illustration for the September issue received much praise for its departure from the typical sf cover. We feel that sf includes a wide spectrum of imaginative literature that should be reflected in the cover art. —EM

Dear Elinor,

Thought I'd lay aside the 'ol white hood, wipe the cross-soot off my hands and pick up on Ernest Hogan's topic. Being new at this, I figure I'm due the naive indulgence of an occasional explanation or two before

terminal arrogance sets in. Besides, it's been a slow month.

Mr. Hogan's criticism of fantasy in general (and indirectly, "The Passing," July, 1981 *Amazing*) is by no means unique—It's been heard quite a bit, lately, leveled at numerous authors and stories. On the surface, it even has merit. I mean, isn't it terribly chauvinistic and limiting to set a story in the culture that just happened to spawn you? Surely the nearly untapped myth-reservoirs of Japan, Africa, Russia, etc. offer fresh and exciting ideas, customs, settings...plots...decorations...superficialities...Just think—Brand new stereotypes! I can see it now...in ten years time some jaded fan can write in and grouse, "Christ, not another Kikiyu spittle-magic story..."

Let's pause a moment before this gets out of hand. It's true that a great deal of fantasy reflects a cultural bias, consciously or no, and what about the fan who doesn't happen to be white anglo-saxon protestant? Doesn't he or she have a right to feel angry and left out? Even to the most culturally rigid the answer has to be 'yes'.

Still, there's something we should all keep in mind in our headlong rush for the new and different, and that is that the 'new and different' soon becomes the 'old and tiresome' by a process no less inevitable (though faster) than the weathering away of a mountain. The writer depending on those two fickle creatures for success must then find an 'old and tiresome' that neglect has transformed into a 'new and different' and *fast*, boyo, or that particular career is grass. The setting is in control, not the writer.

But what if you're not writing a travelogue? With all respects to Mr. Hogan, I have absolutely no desire to set his (or anyone's) sense-of-wonder a-throbbing. Amurlee (from "The Passing") is a very real place to me (and if anyone thinks they've got it pegged after one story they're in for a shock), but Amurlee is not what the story was about. It was about Galshac and Sharea and Taleera and Beron. It was about the silly-assed things we do to ourselves. If the story fails it is on *that* level. Nothing else matters.

^ctually, there's been quite a bit of fan-

tasy published lately that is set in cultures other than European. No need to name names; they're on the racks. With incredibly few exceptions (Samuel R. Delany comes to mind) you'll find Conan, Gandalf, or Razora the Amazon dressed in a ki-mono or lion skin. Yes, 'new and different' is approaching 'old and tiresome' with a speed that makes $E=MC^2$ look like a typo. A stereotype is just that, and the most exotic setting in the world or universe won't change that. Yes, you say, but perhaps with a little more research, a little more work on what makes this culture different... Fine, says I. Do that. No doubt you'll find quite a bit is different. You're also going to find a hell of a lot that isn't different at all: similar heroes, heroines, myths. Identical motivations, and all revolving about the hub of love, hate, fear, courage, cruelty, kindness, and everything else that makes us what we are no matter where we are or what we look like—people. That's what it comes down to, and the most exotic setting in the world or universe won't change *that*, either. Some say that writers use the same old settings out of laziness. Often true, no doubt, but there's another edge on that sword, usually overlooked—if you don't have the strangeness of your stage props for distraction, the audience has to actually pay attention to what the characters are doing and saying. If the audience falls asleep or walks out...well, you blew it, Kid, and there's no kidding yourself about it. But, unlike being content to let the yokels gawk at the painted scenery, it was an honest failure.

I sincerely wish Mr. Hogan luck on his definitive essay, but there's something needing mention before he begins. It has to do with the risks you take when you write about anything, especially something you feel deeply about. If you can find it, read an essay entitled "Die, Black Dog!" by Charles R. Saunders in a wonderful little book called *TOADSTOOL WINE*. It is, alas, already tilled earth.

If any of the above sounds even vaguely like an attack on Ernest Hogan I apologize. He's absolutely right in his call for equality in fantasy, and, if I read the trend right, European-based fantasy is in for a period of ill-repute. Frankly, I think it's a neces-

sary stage that we're all going to go through, and when it's done everyone will be secure enough in their own identity to realize that we mean you when the talk turns to 'people'. Then maybe we can stop worrying about the color of the protagonist's skin long enough to concentrate on what that word really means. At least, we can hope.

Best,

Rick Parks
Decatur, AL

Dear Rick,

Sorry for exploiting you, Rick. It's just that "The Passing" seemed like a convenient excuse to bring up something that has been bothering me for a long time. I agree that fiction should be about people—no matter how they're colored or what their culture is, but the way reading is taught in our society gives most of us (me included) the mind-set that makes a character white until the writer points out otherwise. Something has to be done, and I guess it isn't up to white writers (though some are making an effort) but to minority writers and cross-cultural mongrels like me. I've decided not to write a definitive essay on the subject, but to keep writing sf and fantasy about what interests me: that is, write about the places and times when different cultures come together to fuck 'n' fight and give birth to new worlds; get them published, make money, win awards, become famous and otherwise show everyone what I mean. Your feedback has inspired me. I hope that I've jolted you into some heavy writing.

Ernestly,

Ernest Hogan
West Covina, CA

Dear Ms. Mavor,

I'm an easy-going person and seldom become upset enough to write letters to editors. But I am compelled to protest the inclusion of Ernest Hogan's execrable thing (I won't dignify it by calling it a story) in the March issue. This was more the rape of the reader than of anything else and you were a willing participant.

Avid science fiction readers have to shuck a lot of rough, smelly oysters to find that one pearl we can cherish. We accept it as a labor of love. The task must be even tougher for you editors. But even the less inspired pieces should give us a little something to think about, to lift our minds and spirits or, as a minimum, to momentarily divert and amuse us. I can not discern the standard by which Hogan's was selected. Nor can I believe it was the best you could find.

It was both tasteless and moronic. Can a story focusing on a character who breaks wind, performs eliminatory functions or copulates qualify on that basis alone as fiction? Does placing the action on a space station at a cislunar Trojan point or in a black hole make scatology science fiction?

The piece even failed on its premise of introducing an element of danger in the space colony. Myron was patently not dangerous nor did his victims sense any danger from him. If that oblique and tenuous irony was the point of the story, it wasn't worth writing. This isn't the culture shock Hogan professes to embrace; it is merely puerile glee at being (or trying to be) shocking. An infant can see through it. You should advise Hogan to send his stuff to publications for the mentally defective like *Hustler*. They'll print anything.

You should know better and your readers deserve better. Shame.

Bill Daugherty
Oklahoma City, OK

Fiction that shakes up a reader has been effective. This story made you so mad you felt compelled to tear apart its literary qualifications and castigate the editor for including such a piece in the magazine. Well, it may not be nice to fool the less-than-careful reader—but flamboyant satire can be fun. This tale is NOT about danger: it is about people's attitudes toward one another and how such negative attitudes might be expressed in a future where privilege, prejudice and pampering are carried to ridiculous extremes. Come down off your point-of-view and read it again.—EM

A Conversation with Charles L. Grant

"...anything can scare me if it's done right... children...people who are not what they seem... it's easier to imagine a child than some slime thing that rises out of the sea..."

Darrell Schweitzer

CHARLES L. GRANT'S first story was published in *Fantasy & Science Fiction* in 1968. Since then he has gained a solid reputation—make that two solid reputations. He is a respected figure in science fiction, having won the Nebula Award in 1977 and 1979 and appeared in virtually all the magazines in the field. (Including this one.) His science fiction novels include *Ascension*, *The Shadow of Alpha*, and *Ravens of the Moon*. In the horror/fantasy field he is even more successful. He has been nominated for the World Fantasy Award, either as editor or writer, more than anyone else, and won it for his anthology, *Shadows 1*. (A story from that book, "Naples," by Avram Davidson, also won.) His supernatural stories will shortly be collected by Arkham House as *Tales of the Nightside*. His novels in the genre include *The Last Call of Mourning*, *The Hour of the Oxrun Dead*, and *The Sound of Midnight*. He has recently completed a collection of four related novelettes, *Nightmare Seasons*. Other anthologies edited by him include *Shadows 2*, *3*, *4* and *5* and *Nightmares*.

Be sure to read his story, "The Wind of Lost Migration", in this issue.

AMAZING: What do you think about the state of contemporary supernatural horror fiction?

GRANT: In terms of markets, I guess, it's better than it's been in the last ten years, obviously. In terms of payment, it's not much better, if you talk about short fiction. In terms of novels, it's easier to sell a supernatural horror novel than it has ever been. For novels, the money's better: publicity is better; subsidiary rights are better. Pretty damn good. In terms of quality, the same as always. It's just like science fiction. Out of every ten horror novels published in a year, either in hardback or paperback, maybe three of them are worth reading.

AMAZING: How is the field doing in terms of subject matter? Isn't there a danger of stagnation. Now, the pre-Lovecraftian stories give us the classic ghosts and vampires, and the post-Lovecraftian ones give us the Things-From-Outside and the like. Both can become cliché's.

GRANT: One of the things that contemporary writers are doing is mining different mythologies for their monsters or witches or whatever. American Indians are "in" now. *Prophecy*, for example, which was a God-awful movie. But it wasn't a bad novelization. The book wasn't bad. But American Indians are "in". I had one a long time ago, and I'm trying to buy up all the copies and hide it, that was based on an American Indian myth about Tecumseh. I did the book wrong, but it was my first one. I'm writing a new one now, based on Shoshone Indian myth, which will be much better. So there are other mythologies, Norse, African, etc. Also, modern writers are creating new ones. That's important to avoid stagnation.

AMAZING: But you can still run into problems. Seabury Quinn exploited every mythology conceivable for Jules de Grandin, and the results always came out the same.

GRANT: The thing is to twist it. It's like Quinn Yarbro's vampire. There are just so many things you can write about a vampire, but Quinn has set her vampire up on a timeline that starts with Genghis Khan's

China and goes up through the two world wars. And her vampire is a hero. Fred Saberhagen's trio of Dracula novels have Dracula as the hero, not a villain. You take what is familiar and twist it. I've written one werewolf story and two vampire stories. In the werewolf story, the werewolf feeds on failure. In one of the vampire stories, the vampire feeds on affection, emotion. The vampire has sex with its victim and continues to do so until all emotion is totally drained, whereupon the victim becomes a vampire and carries on. There's no drinking of blood or any of that.

AMAZING: I can see why that hasn't been done before. It wouldn't have been publishable twenty years ago.

GRANT: No, and it wasn't when I first wrote it. ((Laughs.))

AMAZING: Once someone asked you what was the major source of supernatural horror in modern literature, and you said "children".

GRANT: Oh, yes. Stephen King and I have had a running argument about this since we met. King believes that children are basically Good with a capital "G". And he was a teacher, also, which is why I can't understand this. I don't think that children are basically bad, or evil. Children are just so totally amoral that they are about the worst things you could possibly conceive in the entire universe. Children are vicious and nasty and cruel and have no compunctions about doing whatever I have them doing to the adults in my stories. And they always win. The adults are bound by moral decisions and the fact that they don't know what reality is. Children do.

AMAZING: Do you have any children?

GRANT: I have two. A boy and a girl, and they're no different than any other kids. They're so young—one is three and a half; the other is a year and a half—they are just amoral. Vicious, nasty little beasts.

AMAZING: So they would be more effective than Lovecraft's squamous Things?

GRANT: Oh, yes, sure. Because kids are all over the place. It is easier to imagine a child than to imagine some slime thing that

rises out of the sea. I didn't start writing until I was 26, but when I was in high school, for some reason or other, I wrote in a little loose-leaf notebook a story about these things that came out of a swamp, and they were hairy—they looked kind of like mastodons without trunks, and they thudded out of this swamp, destroyed a little town, and thudded back into the swamp again. I think it was all of thirty of those tiny pages, and I would pass those pages around to my history class. Every day I would come in with a new page. I don't know *why* I did it.

AMAZING: I remember doing something like that in high school. Everybody thought it was thrilling.

GRANT: I went to a more sophisticated high school.

AMAZING: That must be it. My story was about man-eating leprechauns who got away with it because of the good press leprechauns always get.

GRANT: That's a perfect example of what I'm talking about. I can't tell you much about it, but I've got an idea for a novel about Merlin which is going to be the exact opposite of what everybody thinks Merlin is, and it'll be a horror novel. You can work with that. You take a leprechaun. Everybody thinks a leprechaun is really neat and it sells Tricks or whatever the hell those—

AMAZING: Lucky Charms. ((A breakfast cereal.))

GRANT: Yeah, and if you can turn such a preconceived notion into something absolutely against the grain, but hide it until the end of the story—that's the key, that you hide the true nature of whatever it is you're working with until the very end of the story, so that the ending is doubly powerful if it's done right. I don't like to guess what's going to happen at the beginning of the story unless I can be convinced that I guessed wrong, which is nice.

AMAZING: You also have to avoid lying to the reader. As an editor you must rather frequently get the story in which you get to the end and discover the guy is a lobster or something.

GRANT: No, no, that's not what I'm talking about at all. A good supernatural

horror story is like a mystery. All the clues are there. The reader *may not necessarily* pick them up until the end, and then he can think back and say, "Oh yes, of course." But no, cheating is out. And I hate stories that cheat. Novels that cheat are even worse.

AMAZING: There's one thing that Bram Stoker did very well which the post-Lovecraftian school doesn't. Well we won't mention names, but—

GRANT: Go ahead.

AMAZING: Okay, let's suppose that Brian Lumley or August Derleth had written *Dracula*. It would be about four chapters long written in the First Person Delirious, and the ultimate shocking revelation, in italics, would have been, *He was a vampire!!!!* It would have been an aborted beginning. But it seems to me that many of the best stories take the surprise and use it as the beginning and go on from there. As Stoker did.

GRANT: Yeah, or as King did in *Salem's Lot*. Seventy-five pages into the book I knew it was about vampires. But go from that to the quality of the writing. In spite of the fact that most people know that the book is about vampires, 50 or 75 pages into this 450 page book, the man is so good at writing about people—and that's the big difference between horror and science fiction—that you keep going anyway, because you know so much about these people that you can't wait to see who's going to get it and who's not. The big thing about *Salem's Lot* is the fact that the heroine gets it, and when she gets nailed by the vampire, the reaction of the reader is, "Jesus Christ, nobody is safe!" Usually, as in *Dracula*, the heroine's sister will get it, but the hero and the heroine are inviolate. Wrong. In *Salem's Lot* the heroine gets it. So you really don't know then, until the very end, who's going to survive. The priest doesn't survive. The best friend doesn't survive. The English teacher doesn't survive. It's only the man and the little boy who do. But even having read the prologue, and knowing that the man and the boy have survived, there is always that element of doubt to the very end, and even

at the end there is no guarantee that all the vampires have been killed. And I know something you don't know.

AMAZING: What?

GRANT: I'll never tell you.

AMAZING: The sequel in which the little boy...Ah, but to change the subject, why do you have such an intense loathing for Lovecraft?

GRANT: Most people that I know who like Lovecraft started reading him when they were young, early teens or pre-teens. I never read any Lovecraft until I got out of college. I found him immensely unreadable. I can read 18th Century British novels with no problem. Lovecraft, I can't touch. He is over-written and he doesn't frighten me. I am not frightened by huge, slimy things with unpronounceable names. That's not frightening to me.

AMAZING: What scares you?

GRANT: ...children...Anything in the right circumstances. Any kind of monster will do. I am a horror movie buff. Where I live the drive-ins in the summer will usually get the grade-Z horror movies that show up two months later on television. But I'll go see them and I'll do my damndest to let them frighten me, even though some of the stuff is really stupid. Just for the hell of it. So anything can scare me if it's done right. What doesn't frighten me are plastic monsters, tentacles and all that kind of shit. People who are not what they seem frighten me. Then there was *Alien*. *Alien* unnerved me considerably. It was one of the top three horror movies that I have seen in my life. I don't consider it science fiction. It's a horror movie with a science fictional background. The last hour and fifteen minutes of *Alien* are absolute, unrelieved tension, unlike *Jaws*, which I also liked. But I waited a year for it. I would not go see *Jaws* until everyone else had seen it. I wasn't going to be one of the crowd that ran right out and stood in line. In *Jaws*, after every appearance or semi-appearance by the shark, there was an instant switch in mood, a comic line by somebody. Like the only time in the film where the shark showed up without the music, and

went swooping over the back of the boat, and Scheider goes backing into the cabin where Robert Shaw is and says, "I think you need a bigger boat." But in *Alien* there is no relief of any tension. The moment they start chasing that thing through the ship, there are no funny lines, no relaxation at all. I had a headache when I was done. I loved it.

AMAZING: Would you go back to see it again?

GRANT: Not for several months, simply because I remember too much. It's too vivid. There are things I'd want blurred before I went back. Otherwise I'd be watching it super-critically. I'd be paying attention to the sets and things like that.

AMAZING: And you might find things wrong with it.

GRANT: I don't nitpick. I don't care. It's an emotional picture. It's like finding nits with *Love Story*. That was the most godawful thing that ever came down the pike, but it was a damn good film in that it did what it was supposed to do. It got too funny for me after a while, but it did what it was supposed to do for most of the people who saw it. *Alien* is the same way. I'm sure there must be holes in the plot somewhere.

AMAZING: It seemed to me to fall into the old horror movie situation of "Let's separate so it can get us one at a time."

GRANT: It probably did. But so what? A horror movie is not necessarily supposed to be sensible.

AMAZING: What about mixing humor and horror?

GRANT: There's no such thing as a funny horror story. There has to be, depending on the length of the story, some lessening of the tension with wit—not humor. Nothing slapstick, in other words. But especially in a long book there should be something to relieve the tension, because a reader can put down a book a lot easier than he can get out of a movie he's paid five bucks to see. So in longer versions there is definitely a need for wit.

AMAZING: Robert Bloch has claimed that humor and horror are two sides of the

same coin, since they both deal with the grotesque, and thus they can somewhat overlap.

GRANT: That's true, but still there is no such thing as a funny horror story. A horror story with a punchline is not a horror story. One with a horrifying punchline, but maybe leads up to it with wit, that's okay. But to use ghosts or vampires to get to a joke, that's not horrifying. It's just another way of telling a joke.

AMAZING: Well, consider something like Ramsey Campbell's "Heading Home". I found that to be a funny story, mostly as a literary exercise because it was dancing on the graves of all the horror story rules.

GRANT: I'll tell you how dense I am. The title gave me no clue to what was going on, and when I got to the end, I got it, and I knew what the title meant. I don't pay much attention to titles, unless they are very long, and then I have to.

AMAZING: Well you use very long titles. An editor who shall remain nameless, who didn't like a story of mine, said, "Why don't you use one of those long, arty titles like C.L. Grant uses?"

GRANT: That shows where his head is at. I haven't used "C.L. Grant" in three years.

AMAZING: You don't like Lovecraft. I assume you don't care for the Lovecraft followers either.

GRANT: Yes, that's right. I don't like Brian Lumley. I didn't like Ramsey Campbell in his early stuff because it was too Lovecraftian. There are a lot of contemporary writers I can't stand. Graham Masterson is terrible. There is a guy named Bernard Taylor, who has written two books that are really excellent. I assume he's British because his books were first published in Britain. One is called *The Godsend* and the other is *Sweetheart, Sweetheart*, and it's the best ghost story I have ever read in my life. That even includes Peter Straub's recent book, *Ghost Story*, which is also excellent. But unfortunately it relies too heavily on what he is trying to do, which is make a literary event out of a horror novel. There are too

many obvious bows to Hawthorne, to Stephen King, and Poe, and James. The references are too bald for me. They also blew it with the last line, which was not good. King's wife and I had a long talk about that on the phone, and we both agreed that he really blew it at the end. I won't tell you the end if you haven't read it. It's a good book, a literary book, and with incredibly real characters, but at the end he blew it.

AMAZING: I remember an introduction to an H.R. Wakefield collection in which he said, "I've written my last ghost story. It's a dead artform."

GRANT: I don't think it's a dead artform. It's all the way you handle it. It's like cliché's in science fiction. There are all sorts of cliché's in supernatural horror fiction. It all depends on how you take the cliché, set it up so people think, "Aha, here we go with another one of these," but if you are sufficiently good in the quality of your writing, people will let you take them along, always hoping in the back of your mind that you're going to do something different. If you do—it doesn't have to be radically different, just enough—then what you've got is an amazingly successful story, and people say, "Oh he did something great and wonderful!" But he really didn't. He just took something and twisted it. That's all it takes.

AMAZING: Wakefield was writing about 1962, which was a pretty low period for the field. There was a Russell Kirk book published that year which seemed to drop right out of sight. Sometimes I'm afraid the revival of the field was caused by *The Exorcist* and *Rosemary's Baby*.

GRANT: No, no. *Films* may owe something to them, although I feel that *Rosemary's Baby* is a far, far better film than *The Exorcist*, simply because *The Exorcist* is not a horror movie. It's a *terror*. *Jaws* was a terror film. It's the difference between shock and fear, which, if you buy *Shadows*, you will learn about in depth, because my introduction is a long essay on the subject. King says that a little revulsion is good for the soul, which is true. But *The Exorcist* did not frighten me. *Jaws* did not

frighten me. Even *Alien* did not frighten me. But it shocked the hell out of me. It's like the old horror movie cliché in which the girl walks up to the closet, puts her hand on the doorknob, and you know there's something behind there, and you say to yourself, "She's really stupid if she opens that door." And she opens it up, and the music gets really loud, and everybody goes "Ahhhh!" That's not fear. That's shock. Fear is *Rosemary's Baby*. Fear is knowing those people are witches. Fear is knowing what's happened to *Rosemary's baby* and watching her progress with this thing in her womb. That's frightening because there are no sudden theatrics with loud music and so on. *The Haunting* is the best movie of that type ever made. That was a frightening movie. Absolutely frightening.

AMAZING: Or *The Innocents*.

GRANT: Yes. *The Innocents*, with Deborah Kerr. Absolutely frightening. As opposed to shock. *Prophecy* is a shock film. It's also a shlock film.

AMAZING: There are a lot like that. I'm told *The Omen* is screamingly funny in places.

GRANT: I like *The Omen* a lot. It had some beautiful scenes in it. The graveyard scene where Peck and whoever it was with him were chased by those dogs, or when the dog is walking through the house, and all you hear are its claws on the bare floor. Or when the priest is being chased by the wind through the park and the lightning rod comes off the church and skewers him. You know this is going to happen, but that's not shock. It's one long build-up scene, a tension scene, which in the priest's case ends with him being skewered, but still it's a frightening thing because the lightning is herding him toward the church and this inevitable end. And yet in the same film they do something dumb, like the scene where the photographer gets beheaded. When his head flies off in the air, I immediately thought, "Gee! That's a neat-looking phoney head." Because you know it's fake. I am never that caught up in a movie that I think the blood is real. That's shock and it's phoney.

It doesn't frighten me. What frightens me is saying that I know what's in Rosemary's womb and I don't want to see it. And if you're smart you never do. Except that—you do know that in the last scene of *Rosemary's Baby*, where the camera moves up to Rosemary and she's singing a lullaby, and it's about to swing over the city, if you look really closely in a theatre—you can't see it in television—you can see the baby mirrored in her eyes? You get just a glimpse of this little devil in the cradle. Neat touch.

AMAZING: Well in Lovecraft's best stories it works this way, with the realization that the universe had become fuzzy around the edges and no longer works by the accepted rules, and may be dissolving on you.

GRANT: Maybe so. I just have this block against Lovecraft's style—except for "The Colour Out of Space" and maybe I cannot get through the style to the story, and as I said before, monsters with totally unpronounceable names don't frighten me. It doesn't do a thing for me. Stephen King works for me. Dennis Etchinson works for me. He is a superb writer. Peter Straub—not *Ghost Story*, but he wrote one called *If You Could See Me Now*, which is a good possession story. And Bernard Taylor. Of course I have favorites. It's not just a matter of quality.

AMAZING: Getting back to your own work, what is your favorite story and why?

GRANT: It's always, without exception, the one I'm working on now (assuming we're talking about horror novels and such). I know that's a pat, writer-type answer, but it's true. You see, I have to scare myself first, before I'll send anything out; so, if I'm not doing better now than I did last time out, I'm not doing well at all. And if I am doing better, then I'm growing. And if I'm growing, then *that's* my favorite. Of previously published material, though, I would have to say, *The Last Call of Mourning*. I love my ending. It's really rather disgusting if you take the time to think of the implications to Cyd (the heroine). Stories? Two: "Love-Starved" and "Hear Me Now, My Sweet Abbey Rose."

AMAZING: What is the most important thing you've learned as a writer, either about technique, or simply about being a professional?

GRANT: That if I don't grow, I don't work. If I can't see that I'm better this year than last, I might as well hand it up and go back to teaching. I've also learned about rhythm in writing. When I'm finished with a story (story or novel; again, in horror), I read it aloud. And if a sentence doesn't work in rhythm with the paragraph, the paragraph in rhythm with the page, etc., I redo it. I think that's vital, because if you can catch the reader in a rhythm (however unconscious it is on the reader's part), when you depart from it, you jolt him. And the only time I do that is for effect. The rhythm also works toward another, vastly important part of what I do—the end line. I'll tell you, the agonies I go through just to get the last line exactly the way it should be in the story...I wouldn't wish that on anybody. In fact, very often I spend as much time thinking of a last line as I do on the rest of the story. But, boy, when it works... I love it.

AMAZING: What are your actual writing methods like?

GRANT: I start serious writing (that is, not letters or articles or notes for something) around one in the afternoon. This is when I do the stories/novels that aren't closest to my evil little heart. This, for example, is when I do my science fiction, and the other books that I've done in other genres under other names. After a two-hour break for a meal, I start writing again around 7:30 or so. Here's where I do my hard stuff, the writing I sometimes literally sweat over. This, until about midnight or one A.M. In the actual composition, I write out a complete draft of the story or novel, paying no attention to grammar, spelling (I use a kind of typewriter shorthand here), things like that. I write it as fast as I can, just to get the story out. Then I go back and make notes to myself (add a scene here, cut this, etc.) and start the final draft: here's where I work on the rhythm, the dialogue, the description and the last line(s). What it boils down to, then, is very often I'm

working on two books (or stories) at the same time. Fast in the afternoon and slow at night. I used to do it all in longhand, but that's too slow. There's too much I want to write, and write about, so I have to cram as much in as I can. This, by the way, is a typical five-day week.

AMAZING: You have a great interest in films. Have you ever had any connections with Hollywood?

GRANT: No. "A Crowd of Shadows" was going to be an NBC-TV movie, but the deal fell through when the man in charge was bumped to a new executive position. Actually, it turned out fairly well: the treatment I did for the short story I turned into a novel, and sold it to Berkley.

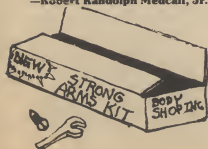
AMAZING: What have you recently had published?

GRANT: *Shadows 4*; two science fiction novels from Berkley: *Passage* (4th book of the Parric series), and *A Quiet Night of Fear* (novelization of "A Crowd of Shadows"); *Nightmare Season* and *The Lions of the Plain* (the former is an Oxrun Station Book, the latter the sequel to *Ravens of the Moon* and the lead-in to the first Parric novel); *The Grave and The Bloodstone* (from Popular Library—two original Oxrun Station novels). All these were released in 1981. Scheduled for 1982 release are *Shadows 5*, (Doubleday), *Horrors and Terrors* (Playboy Press), a mainstream entry, *The Nestling* (Pocket Books), and two new Oxrun Station books, *Bloodwind* (Popular Library) and *Nightmare Seasons* (Doubleday).

The Body Merchants

The body merchants vend their ware
With custom sculpture, rooted hair
Their customers are pleased to view
A skin that's pigmented a novel hue
In stainless steel vats
They combine proteins, carbohydrates, and fats
Gristle, sinew, and bone
The final product has excellent muscle tone
Brains ordered in hat sizes
Domed forehead the new owner prizes
Musculature that's athletic,
Sedentary, or ascetic
All support systems operational
The life expectancy is sensational
It's only the price
That isn't so nice

—Robert Randolph Medcalf, Jr.



J. Ray Dettling

TOMORROW'S AMAZING TRANSPORT MACHINES

*Exploring practical and
esoteric possibilities for
getting places in the 21st
Century*

IT HAS OFTEN been said that in a world of efficient communications there will be no need for transportation. But is this really true? Do we really expect the upcoming communication revolution spell the demise of our transportation system.

The answer is not clear cut. It may be a little bit yes and a little bit no.

A few decades ago when the first TVs amazed families throughout the world, it was thought that the end was near for motion picture theaters. But it didn't happen. More movies came out in vivid color, and after a struggle, TV followed suit, but then motion picture industry upped the resolution, expanded their screens and added a high fidelity stereophonic sound, all providing a new dimension of realism as yet unattainable in today's TV systems. But watchout! The next generation TVs are coming. . . .

Well, you get the picture. The TV and motion picture industries became competitive—each forcing improvements in the other. The same is true of transportation and communication. As our communication system improves, so must our

Illustrated by Rick Landerman



transportation system. But what form will these improvements take?

To explore some possibilities, we gaze up when at a very special moment in time. To be exact it is 9:00 AM, April 25, 2051. The place is the 4th floor of the massive Cryorestitution and Orientation Building located on the outskirts of Walnut Creek, California.

TOM FLETCHER waited anxiously in a small conference room to meet his assigned patient—a transportation engineer in his mid thirties, pronounced dead 68 years ago from a highly toxic form of leukemia. A special life extension insurance policy provided all the funds necessary for a speedy cryonic suspension with the hope that in some future generation the technology would be available to resuscitate him. The success ratio was low, but Tom Fletcher's patient was one of the lucky ones.

The door opened and a dark haired medium built man entered. He was followed by one of the facility's many cryobiologists who was quick to make the introductions.

"Mr. Fletcher, this is Larry Simpson; Larry, Tom Fletcher. He will be your guide to the 21st century for the next couple of months."

Simpson nodded, scanned the room then took a seat. He continued looking around, fidgeting, impatiently seeking manifestations of the super technology he has heard so much about since his resuscitation. With the exception of the keyboard pads at each position around the table and the large opto-electronic screen on the wall, the room was not much different from those he was used to in the past.

"That's true, but only on a very basic level. Besides that, it was expensive and it only applied to moving large groups of people over a limited number of routes. People wanted more flexibility and personalized service, so as the cost of this technology declined, group transportation systems evolved back to personalized transportation finally reaching the system we have here.

"Consider the advantages. No parking problems. Your personal vehicle is always

seconds away. There are virtually no breakdowns. You never run out of gas, no traffic jams, and you only pay for the vehicle when you use it, unlike yesterday's automobile that took up valuable space in your garage taxing your budget whether you were using it or not.

"Yes, I see. And you would only need to manufacture the number of cars required to handle the maximum demand. God, the savings in resources—"

Fletcher smiled inwardly. Resources were a major concern during Simpson's time.

"But what about hybrids?" Simpson asked. "What ever became of flywheels, electrics, and all that?"

Fletcher gulped the last of his rejuv then stretched back in his seat. "I'm afraid flywheels never quite made it—too dangerous. Oh they were used on some public vehicles, but the energy density was just too low to make them practical for the family car. What actually became more interesting for a short period of time were hybrids powered by a small conventional gas engine assisted by high strength elastomers."

"Rubber bands?" Simpson regarded Fletcher's smile. "You're kidding."

"Sounds crazy doesn't it? But when you remember that energy can be defined as a force multiplied by a distance, and high strength elastomers can exert a very large force while still having an elongation capability of over 300 percent; well, you're talking about a lot of energy."

"You're really serious; aren't you?"

"Do the numbers, you'll find that elastomers—or rubber bands as you called them—can store much more energy than a steel spring, a high pressure gas bottle, or for that matter, a flywheel." Fletcher studied the dubious look on Simpson's face. "Of course, the elastomers were manufactured with very high quality materials."

Fletcher studied him thoughtfully. "Well Larry, our first day's going to be a busy one. We'll be making a quick stop in Boston. It's my daughter's birthday. She's spending the summer with her grandparents, and if I don't get her present to her on time, not only will she be disappointed, but her grandparents will disown

me."

Simpson chuckled and shook his head, partly at Fletcher's exaggeration, but also because he was truly impressed. After all, a quick stop in Boston?

"Oh, it's nothing," Fletcher continued. "Transcontinental trips are extremely common now. In fact, you'll find that a fair number of people working in this building commute daily from the east side—the east coast, that is. I wouldn't want to do it myself, but some people don't mind. It gives them time to relax and pick up a good breakfast on the magplane—"

Simpson looked confused. "Planes that use the Earth's magnetic field?"

"I'm sorry," Fletcher responded. "For a moment I forgot that magplanes were developed after you went into suspension. But no, they don't use the Earth's magnetic field. Flight has never been achieved that way and I doubt that it ever will. The fields are just too weak." Fletcher regarded Simpson carefully, and was glad to see that Simpson appeared to be relieved at the conclusion. "Actually," Fletcher continued, "the magplane is not a plane at all. It's a high speed rail system, yet the name magplane is quite appropriate as you'll find out soon."

"Yes, I remember reading several proposals for systems riding on magnetic cushions. Some were pretty far out."

Fletcher chuckled inwardly. The casual usage of the term "far out" crystallized the time from which Simpson emerged. "Rather than sitting here talking about it, let's see it for ourselves."

"Love to."

Fletcher drew up his sleeve and spoke into what appeared to be a wristwatch. "Request guideway taxi in five minutes at Station 3, C&O Building." His wristwatch responded with three beeps, then he lowered his sleeve and motioned to Simpson. "All set."

"What w—?"

Fletcher smiled. "C'mon, let's go. I'll explain it to you on the way down."

As they left the room, Fletcher looked back at the cryobiologist and read the silent message in his expression. "Go easy on him, Fletcher."

When they emerged from the lobby a taxi was waiting for them. Simpson's eyes

wandered as he took in the activity on the outside. The scene was both familiar and strange. People scuffling about on sidewalks, each intent on carrying out their immediate goals, their expressions reflecting the same priorities of a century before. Even their clothes and hairstyles hadn't changed much.

Still many things were different. Buildings took on assorted strange shapes. The simple-to-construct rectangular shapes were no longer dominant. It ached Simpson to try to imagine how such odd shapes could be constructed economically. Very few vehicles were parked, yet the thoroughfares were bustling with activity. Soundless vehicles flowed with effortless grace, while pedestrians glided along moving walkways.

But there was still something else—something about the people that was different. Simpson couldn't pinpoint exactly what it was, so he let it go for a moment, then for the first time he took a good look at their taxi. It was shaped like the compact vehicles of the 1980's, yet it was sleeker with no visible seams except at the center where a sliding door was drawn open. But most striking of all was the fact that it had no wheels. It simply hovered a few inches above the ground. Simpson looked dubious as Fletcher motioned him in.

"There's no driver," he said not really too surprised.

Fletcher smiled. "In most places it's illegal to drive—to much chance for error. In fact, we began automating personalized transportation even before the end of your century. It was inevitable. As safety, efficiency and overall performance requirements increased, so did the need for the on-board computer which was already available at low cost. But once the computer became an integral part of the vehicle, it was just a matter of time before the individual computers would link up to a central system."

"But what happens when the central computer breaks down? There must be one hell of a traffic jam."

"The computer never breaks down—at least it hasn't so far. Even if something does go wrong, the system repairs itself before things get too serious. We just don't

worry about things like that." Fletcher could see that Simpson still felt uncomfortable with the answer. "But if something did go wrong," he added, "like a bomb or something at the central processor, everything would safely come to a halt, then revert to manual operation."

Feeling a bit more confident in the system's integrity, Simpson stepped into the vehicle. It lowered against his weight with a strange bouyancy. The inside, designed to comfortably seat four passengers around a central table, was surprisingly roomy. A computer terminal protruding down from the roof awaited instructions.

Fletcher held down the speak key and addressed the computer:

FLETCHER THOMAS A, GSA 52-731-419, C&O DUTY

DESTINATION: 339 WHITE OAK DRIVE, BOSTON MASS.

PRIORITY STATUS: 2

He released the key and the computer responded with an "ENTRY CONFIRMED, TIME OF ARRIVAL; 1:36 PM EASTERN STANDARD TIME."

Simpson, remembering the three hour time difference between the east and west coast, said, "Wait a minute; that's only an hour and a half from now."

Before Fletcher could respond, a voice came from the terminal. "Refreshments are limited to coffee, tea, non-psychotropic cocktails or rejuv."

Fletcher answered immediately. "One rejuv and—" He directed his attention toward Simpson.

"That's incredible! Oh coffee—uh—black'll be fine," Simpson responded shaking his head.

A few moments later small panels retracted, and the drinks appeared in a recessed well alongside the seat. "Well I'll be damned," Simpson remarked while retrieving his drink. He gingerly sipped his coffee. "Not bad either," he added then noticed the bright green drink in Fletcher's hands. "What did you call that?"

"A rejuv. It's a rejuvenation cocktail—a concoction of vitamins, special enzymes, and antioxidants. It guards against aging."

Simpson looked dumbfounded, then his expression brightened. "That's what was so different about the people in the street.

There were no old people, or at least nobody looked old. This is so much more than I bargained for. My God, how long I mean what's the average—"

"In most cases people can live as long as they want, at least as far as we know they can, but of course we haven't really tested it out much longer than the last 70 years or so, So far it seems to work."

"This is crazy. There's so much to learn. Tom, I feel like a neanderthal man. How can I possibly catch up?"

"Whoa! Slow down Simpson. What you're feeling is what everybody feels when they've been under for awhile, but you've got to remember that education has also come a long way. With our technology you can learn things much faster than you think. Hell, we can even implant memories directly onto your brain—"

Simpson frowned as if a sour note had been struck. Fletcher left no space for interruption. Other counselors would cover those subjects. "Believe me Larry, you'll have no trouble catching up. It's the emotional aspects that are tough, but you've got it easier than most. You never left a wife and family behind. That's when it really gets tough."

Simpson looked dubious, mildly disturbed.

"Look, you were, or rather are a transportation engineer, and a good one at that, a bit outdated perhaps, but in a few months time I have no doubt that you'll be right on top of things again, possibly even making improvements to our system—that is if you're still interested in transportation."

"Interested! Hell, after seeing all this, I'm more interested than ever." Simpson waved his hand toward the outside where twisting guideways and conveyor belts shuttled passengers effortlessly throughout the megapolis once known as a string of small towns connecting the San Francisco Bay to the San Ramon Valley.

Fletcher felt an almost sadistic pleasure in overdosing his patient. "You haven't seen anything yet," he said, "we have—"

"No please, don't tell me any more until you first explain what makes this thing tick." He tapped the side wall of their vehicle.

"Sure, but it would be easier if I gave you

a brief history on how it evolved first."

"Yes, I'd be interested in that." Simpson drew a mouthful of coffee, then sank deep in his seat.

"Well it all started," Fletcher began, "back in your generation, when it became increasingly apparent that the existing system would soon become unmanageable. Personal vehicles were horribly inefficient requiring vast amounts of land resources. Not only that, they were downright unsafe. Sure great efforts were made to make them more efficient and less hazardous, but this resulted in greater financial burdens on the consumer. With rising energy costs, insurance rates, land values, and costs of government regulations along with improvements in communications, people were starting to give up the privately owned vehicle for public transportation systems.

"At the same time, there was a great deal of new technology waiting to be exploited—fuel management computers, compact collision avoidance radar systems, active electronic road signs, traffic monitoring devices, and a host of other devices that in one way or another improved vehicle safety, economy or performance. Soon people realized the synergism that was possible by combining these technologies. Likewise—"

"Wait a minute," Simpson interrupted. "These technologies were already part of the public transportation system even before I—uh—went under."

"Of course," Simpson agreed sarcastically.

Fletcher smiled. "Don't let it bother you too much. Before rubber band power became a household term, the long awaited breakthrough in batteries arrived. Soon everything became electric." Fletcher seemed to read the thoughts behind the frown on Simpson's face. "Yes, electricity is the most economical form of energy these days, thanks to the continuing battle between the satellite power stations and the ground based fusion power plants."

Simpson tried to cut in but Fletcher continued. "We'll get to all that later. For now the only thing that's important is the fact that energy is cheap and plentiful. And

the transcontinental HTS—uh—that is high temperature superconducting grid, makes electricity the easiest way to transport and distribute this energy. All these technologies combined made the present transportation system inevitable.

"I'm beginning to get the big picture, but there are so many details—"

"They'll come in good time, I can assure you. Today we'll do well just to get an overview." Fletcher pointed out the window. Hundreds of vehicles skimmed over the waters of the San Francisco Bay.

"Surface effect vehicles," Simpson remarked.

"They're used more for recreation than for anything else—and they're all manually driven. See we haven't taken *all* the fun out of driving."

Simpson threw up his eyebrows, then noticed the red indicator light on the computer terminal. The first leg of their trip was about to end. When they finally came to a halt in front of the Oakland Transport Center, the computer displayed the elapsed time and cost.

As soon as they stepped out, the vehicle departed, only to stop 50 meters later to pick up three new passengers. The utter efficiency of it all bothered Simpson. Despite what Fletcher said, he still felt like a caveman in this strange new world.

"Look over there," Fletcher said suddenly. "One of our transcontinental cargo craft."

An enormous aircraft darkened the sky as it rose from behind the main terminal building. "Look at the size of that thing. It makes the 747 look like a toy."

"And it's a hell of a lot quieter from what I've heard about the old jets."

Simpson followed the craft across the sky shielding his eyes from the sun. "How did they ever get rid of the noise?"

"As you've no doubt noticed, there are no jet engines, only props; but they're all electric which makes them much quieter and more efficient than jets or internal combustion engines. Hydrogen power was used for awhile, quite successfully too, but energy storage breakthroughs, added to the success of the laser wand, made the combustible fuel system obsolete for most commercial applications.

Simpson dropped his hand from his eyes and turned toward Fletcher. "A laser what?"

"A laser wand—you noticed that large platform above the fuselage—"

"I was about to ask about that."

"It's a heat collector. It absorbs the heat energy from one of the many orbital lasers, then converts it to electricity to power the engines either through a turbine or, as in the newer ones, by high temperature photovoltaics."

Simpson looked appalled. "Isn't that a bit reckless? I mean, what happens if the laser misses?"

"It can't. The laser only fires at full power when it is on target. In fact, the laser is controlled from the target." Fletcher paused to let it sink in then continued. "Actually, it's fail safe. If anything goes wrong, the laser shuts off and another takes its place. And if that didn't work, the aircraft always has enough reserve power to land safely."

Simpson threw out his hands. "Jeez! One minute you're talking rubber bands; the next minute, lasers. What haven't you guys thought of?"

"Why Larry!" Fletcher said with feigned astonishment. "I'm surprised at you. These things were all dreamed up in your time. We just happened to have the engineering technology to make them practical, or I should say 'economical'."

"Hah—I must have been sleeping," Simpson remarked. A disturbed expression lingered on his face. Had he only prepared himself, this would have been so much easier.

"Hey c'mon," Fletcher said, rapping Simpson on the shoulder. "We've got a train to catch. There's a lot more of your ideas we've brought to life that you have got to see. Then I'll show some of the things we've been dreaming up."

Simpson forced a laugh. "That I've got to see."

After a quick check-in, they descended to the Magplane boarding gate. It was every bit as confusing as the international airports of the 20th century, but Fletcher seemed to know exactly where to go. Simpson followed, confidently stretching his neck to take everything in.

At the boarding gate Fletcher identified himself, rattled off a series of numbers, and a green boarding light cleared them through a tube which, as far as Simpson could tell, mated with the side of the magplane. A low pitched hum could be felt from the floor as they made their way to their assigned seats.

Within a few minutes the entry tubes hissed and clanged as they disengaged from the magplane. At the same time motors and pumps kicked on to evacuate the large boarding chamber. As the air thinned out the sounds subsided, except the purring of the electromagnets became louder. Directly in front of them the small screen continuously recycled routine information about their destination.

Fletcher retracted a pill and a cup of water from the side panel and offered it to Simpson. "Here, this will make the ride more comfortable. Prevents nausea," he added seeing the dubious look on Simpson's face.

"Some things never change," Simpson thought to himself, then swallowed the pill even though he considered it unnecessary. The train started to move, and a pretty face appeared on the screen to greet them. Simpson found her plastic smile mildly offensive. "Now there's a good reason for the air sickness pills," he said sarcastically.

Fletcher raised his hand to block any further comment, then directed Simpson to listen.

The pretty face continued. "...and remember, if you must leave your seat, use the center handrail. And never jump or run on the magplane. For your convenience the Model 14 employs an adjustable stepped aisle. If we can be of any other service please don't hesitate to call." The pretty face winked and the screen went blank.

Simpson ignored the last insult. "What the hell's an adjustable stepped aisle?"

"The floor is divided into small sections which can tilt up to form a series of steps. It makes it easier to walk while this thing is accelerating. Don't forget, this thing peaks out at 22,500 kilometers per hour—let's see, that's about 14,000 miles per hour. At that speed you lose about 60% of

your weight—”

“A little faster and you’d be in orbit,” Simpson remarked.

“That’s right.” Fletcher delivered an omniscient smile and waited for the next question.

“Of course you’d gain some of that weight back while the magplane accelerates.”

“Yes indeed,” Fletcher responded, “the magplane accelerates at nearly a constant .4 gees—you’ll notice it in a minute or so. At first you’d feel your normal downward weight, but the .4 gee acceleration will also push you against the back of your seat. This will make your total weight increase by something like 8%—not much different than riding in one of your high performance automobiles. But as we start picking up speed—”

Simpson felt a strange sensation, and couldn’t help interrupting. “It feels like we’re climbing.”

“An excellent example of Einstein’s equivalence principle,” Fletcher noted. Without any windows, we cannot tell whether we are acceleration or gravity is increasing. We seem to be climbing because our resultant apparent weight is tilted aft. I told you there was a reason to keep the name ‘magplane’. Well you’ve just discovered why. It really feels like we’re flying.”

Simpson noticed that the climb angle seemed to be increasing, then realized that as the speed increased, the centrifugal force reduced his downward weight, so that his resultant weight shifted further toward the back of the seat. The aisle was now a series of steps. If one had to get to the front of the craft, he would literally have to climb up the aisle. Simpson was pleasantly fascinated by this experience.

About 10 minutes later the acceleration stopped. Fletcher noticed the startled look on Simpson’s face, then explained, “We just crossed the halfway point.”

Just then the screen brightened and the same pretty face appeared. “We hope you have enjoyed the first half of your trip. We will be slowing down during the second half until our destination is reached. For your safety and comfort, your seats will be reoriented. Please make sure all obstacles are removed. Thank you....”

“Amazing,” Simpson remarked, then studied his seat, picked up his sweater and placed it on his lap. He heard a hiss and felt his seat slowly tilt back nearly 45 degrees, all the while his weight increased to about 60% of normal, although he seemed much lighter. They were now plunging “downward” at 22,500 kilometers per hour.

“Quite a system, eh?”

Simpson caught himself white-knuckling the arm rests. Feeling a bit embarrassed, he relaxed his grip. “Boy, if that isn’t the understatement—”

“Hey, how about a drink? I’ll buy,” Fletcher joked.

“Sure, coffee—uh—make that a rejuv.”

“A rejuv it is.”

On the last half of their trip they discussed other aspects of the magplane. Simpson worried about earthquakes, power failures, vacuum failures, computer malfunctions and a host of other maladies, but Fletcher had solid answers for all of these.

The most remarkable fact of all was that the magplane consumed very little energy. With superconducting magnets and regenerative braking, over 90% of the energy expended to accelerate the magplane was recovered during braking. Thus during the last half of their ride, the magplane was repaying most of the energy it consumed during the first half.

A week passed. Simpson felt strangely content. Oddly enough the things he had seen the week before did not seem strange anymore. Amazing how fast one can adjust to novelty when there is no choice. He had spent most of the week sitting at the video terminal, reading everything he could. He was prepared for his next field trip with Fletcher.

Today they would make their way to one of the highest points in Colorado, a place called Mount Evans, about 80 kilometers west of Denver. At the top of this mountain, amid what used to be some of the world’s greatest ski resorts, was one of the two earth-based laser trams.

The laser tram was a rather unique way to lift a payload to earth orbit. Its principle was simple: Take a high powered laser and direct its energy to the thrust chamber of a spacecraft. Deposit this energy into an

inexpensive working fluid and let the working fluid expand through a nozzle as in a conventional rocket. Another simple, but elegant, idea from the 20th century.

They arrived in Denver on a small electrically powered short haul aircraft, then with little delay they transferred to a 10-passenger air taxi. Within minutes the top of Mt. Evans was visible through the cloud cover. An incredibly large tower added another 1000 meters to the mountain's existing 4300-meter height.

"Well, there she is," Fletcher remarked. "Look!" he added. A stubby projectile shot out from the top of the tower. It was reminiscent of Jules Verne's giant cannon approach toward launching a projectile to the moon. A second or two later, a well defined beam extended from the projectile toward another point on the mountain top about 500 meters from the tower. The beam was not visible near the ground. It seemed to materialize out of thin air halfway toward the spacecraft. Its end flickered as if trying to close the gap to the ground.

Simpson looked puzzled. "I thought these things used an infrared laser."

"They do. What you're seeing is not the laser beam itself," Fletcher explained. "It's the effect of atmospheric recovery after being upset by the intense electric and magnetic fields in the beam."

"I see," Simpson acknowledged, then noticed that they had been descending. Many more details were beginning to appear. The tower was shrouded with a labyrinth of tubing, truss work, and countless movable platforms. What appeared to be the main terminal building stood prominently alongside the launch tower, yet there seemed to be little activity there. Several smaller buildings were scattered across the mountain top. Finally, a much larger building stood alone at one end of a carved plateau. At the other end was a massive bank of precisely positioned reflectors to direct billions of watts of laser energy to the tiny spacecraft.

As they circled the mountain top, they could see the winding highway, which at one time must have been no more than a hiker's trail. Now it was a heavily trafficked, fully automated thoroughfare.

Suddenly Simpson realized that the main entrance to the terminal building was not at the top of the mountain. It was several hundred feet lower where the highway disappeared into the mountainside. The terminal entry at the top was only to accommodate the air taxis. Just as they descended to the landing platform, a second spacecraft exited the launch tube.

Inside the terminal, Simpson was shocked to find literally thousands of people scrambling in and out of restaurants, shops, weigh-in stations and boarding gates. The utter nonchalantness of it all was a major setback to Simpson's emotional adjustment.

High on the main wall of the lobby was a large chart with several screens. One of the screens presented a view of the launch tube from the outside. An alphanumeric display, apparently designating the current flight status, appeared on the lower right corner. Two other screens displayed an awesome view of two large space habitats. As incredible as it seemed, these were real views as seen from approaching spacecraft. They were the destinations of current flights. Lights flickered and danced around the screens as conditions changed.

Below the screens was a graphic model of the terminal. Five gates were arranged in a starburst pattern around the base of the launch tower, a good hundred meters underground. Judging from the fact that two of the gates were not illuminated on the chart, Simpson assumed they were still uncompleted. The others seemed to be earmarked for specific destinations. The whole thing was utterly incredible.

Simpson would have given anything to jump on one of those flights, but their schedule did not permit that. Today's plan was simply to visit the terminal and the largest aerospace museum in the world, which happened to be in the same place. A flight to earth orbit would just have to wait—but not for long, Fletcher promised.

An elevator took them to one of the lower levels and exposed them to a large corridor which led to the museum.

"You could spend at least a week in here," Fletcher remarked. "They've got

everything from Da Vinci's original drawings to replicas of the Wright Brothers first aircraft to the first fusion powered star probe."

Simpson wasn't interested in Da Vinci or the Wright Brothers. Starships, on the other hand were another matter. He would concentrate on what took place in the last 70 years or so. "Now that sounds interesting," Simpson said making it perfectly clear that he was only interested in completing the history he had lost.

As they cleared the corridor, a vast panorama of exhibits became visible. Simpson futilely tried to take it all in, then something caught his attention—a sign that read "Chronology Of Aerospace 1800-2051 And Beyond".

Fletcher looked toward Simpson. An omniscient smile brightened his expression, then without saying a word, they proceeded toward the sign. Simpson immediately moved toward the space shuttle, studied it carefully, then established his present in the chronology. From the shuttle he moved onward in time to a family of heavy lift vehicles developed in the late nineties to support the construction of the large solar power satellites.

Around the same time an advanced space shuttle appeared. Unlike its predecessor, the advanced shuttle was fully reusable. The solid rocket boosters were replaced by a 10 kilometer electromagnetic rail, while the massive external tank was replaced by a reusable ramjet engine. Superconducting magnets accelerated the shuttle through the sound barrier. At this point the ramjet engine took over bringing the craft beyond a 50 kilometer elevation at seven times the speed of sound. Having served its purpose, the ramjet disengaged itself from the orbiter and was flown to a safe landing. A modest size engine on board the shuttle orbiter carried it the remaining distance to earth orbit.

Because of its economy, it became the standard method for carrying passengers to space. Soon every major country had at least one launching port, with the United States being the main supplier of hardware. As more entrepreneurs ventured into space, the demand for lower cost

transportation escalated, which ultimately led to the laser tram.

"The laser tram cut launch costs down to something like \$125 per kilogram," Fletcher pointed out. Then, after reading Simpson's expression, he clarified his statement. "That's somewhere near a dollar fifty per kilogram in 1980 money—not bad when you consider that around 1980 things were costing near \$600 per kilogram with the first space shuttle."

Simpson's expression softened. He curled his mouth down and shook his head in agreement, and wondered to himself if Fletcher had boned up on all these details for his benefit.

Fletcher tapped his hand on the model and reaffirmed what he had said. "Yes, there's nothing cheaper than the laser tram except—"

Simpson's attention heightened. "What's that?"

"Except for—oh hell, it's easier just to show you."

Fletcher led him past several exhibits that characterized the turn of the century: a family of transcontinental hypersonic aircraft, behemoth flying wings carrying over 400 tons of cargo, and short-haul wide-bodied aircraft with accommodations for 2000 passengers at a time. Finally they stopped at an elaborate display which Simpson could hardly take seriously. It suggested an entirely different approach toward lifting payloads into space.

"They've got to be joking," Simpson insisted. "I mean—a cable all the way to geosynchronous orbit?"

"Why not?" Fletcher responded casually. "An elevator is by far the cheapest way to raise something from one level to the next. In fact, once the system is established, it would cost almost nothing to make a trip to geosynchronous orbit."

"How's that?"

"Well, it's really quite obvious when you get down and think about it. The energy required to lift a set of passengers up the cable is balanced by the energy released when another set of passengers is brought down."

Simpson felt embarrassed about missing something so elementary. Somehow he hadn't thought about pas-

sengers coming back down. "Like weights on a pulley," he interjected in a quick recovery.

"Exactly."

"But this is crazy," Simpson insisted, his raised voice bending a few heads nearby. "I may have been in Limbo for 70 years or so, but I can still remember from engineering school that there was no material that could support over a few miles of its own weight—15 to 20 miles at the most. And it didn't matter how thick the cable was. A thick cable was stronger, but it was also heavier—"

"Hold on Larry. You're right; it does take a strong cable, but more important, it takes a strong and a *light* cable. 20 miles—let's see, that's about 32 kilometers—not a bad number for steel around your time, but if your college professor would have taken a good look at silicon carbide or graphite materials, he would have come up with a number closer to 1000 kilometers."

"I have to admit. I didn't look at it that close. But still—"

"I know, a thousand kilometers still falls far short of our requirements for a space cable," Fletcher said as Simpson nodded in agreement. "But—don't forget, we've made some progress while you were sleeping." He poked Simpson on the arm and waited for a response.

Simpson rolled his eyes and smiled. "I wasn't exactly having pleasant dreams, you know."

"Oh no? Remind me to show you the EEG tapes we took."

Simpson looked genuinely surprised. "Just kidding," Fletcher added. "But seriously, around the turn of the century, space manufacturing really took off. Many new materials were developed with order-of-magnitude improvements in strength-to-weight ratio over what we had before. These materials are available right now. In fact, right now congress is studying proposals to build a single space port to be cost shared by all nations."

"God! The cost, it must be beyond belief."

"It won't be cheap," Fletcher agreed, "but not as bad as you might think either. The proposal calls for bringing resources from the moon, processing them in space, then starting the cable from geosyn-

chronous orbit."

"Ah, I see; you save the cost of dragging materials up from the earth. But even then—"

"Yah, but that's not all," Fletcher continued. "The space cable not only makes trips to geosynchronous orbit cheap; it makes all space travel cheap." Before Simpson could ask his next question, Fletcher went on to explain. "The reason stems from the fact that you cannot just hang a cable down to earth from a platform in geosynchronous orbit. You'd soon start to drag down the whole system, because the center of gravity would no longer be at the required altitude to maintain a geosynchronous orbit. To compensate for this, you must counterbalance the cable by simultaneously building outward from the platform away from the earth."

"Of course," Simpson said excitedly. "Any part of the cable that is out beyond the geosynchronous orbit altitude will be moving too fast to remain in that same orbit if it were not attached to the rest of the system. So all one would have to do is climb out on the cable the right distance and let go, and he can escape the earth's gravity altogether. That's fantastic. It's a free ride to any place in the solar system."

"Or outside it for that matter," Fletcher added, then led the way to the next exhibit.

After studying several other exhibits, they came to a corridor with a label above it that simply said: **GRAVITY—TOMORROW'S MOTIVE FORCE.** Without hesitation, they entered.

Inside Simpson learned that scientists over the last fifty years have finally come to understand the true nature of gravity and were beginning to control it. A large glass case in the center of the room attracted his attention. Inside the case was a small metal cube on a white platform. Below and above the platform there was a piece of machinery that was totally unfamiliar to Simpson. Outside the glass case was a power-on switch and a joystick.

"Go ahead, try it," Fletcher persuaded.

Simpson turned on the switch. A digital readout indicated the weight of the block at exactly 0.25 kilogram—a little over a half pound, Simpson thought to himself.

He reached for the joystick and slowly

moved it. The readout changed accordingly. Finally the cube lifted off the platform then, suspended in midair, it moved effortlessly in any direction while Simpson moved the joystick. "This is fantastic—antigravity, I mean this is something people only dreamed about." Simpson lowered the cube and turned to Fletcher.

"I'm afraid we're not quite there yet," Fletcher said. "There's a hell of a lot of machinery behind the scenes dedicated to lifting that small cube."

"Yes, but just the idea that you can do it—"

"You're right, but a self contained flying machine is a good 10, maybe 20 years away." Fletcher placed his hand on Simpson's shoulder. "There's a lot of research left to do. Maybe you would like to become a part of it."

"Oh, I don't know. The physics is beyond me. I mean, regardless of what you say, I still feel like a caveman."

Fletcher laughed. "Keep it in mind, you may think differently later. Besides for the most part, the physics is done. The rest is engineering and applications." Fletcher extended his arm toward the rest of the gravity exhibits.

They moved to a model of a floating city. "Once we have mastered gravity," Fletcher continued, "we will become a true three dimensional society. People will casually hold conversations 1000 meters in midair. Buildings can take on new heights and move to wherever and whenever it was convenient. Earthquake damage will be a thing of the past. Trips to the moon will be as easy as trips across the country."

Simpson regarded Fletcher's words and thought how strange the world had become. How fast would it change in the next fifty years? Although part of him yearned for the security of the past, he knew that was impossible, and he knew even more that he could not afford to miss any more of the present. He would get involved; he would learn everything he could; and he would take part in shaping the future.

This resolution excited him but it also saddened him deeply. The Larry Simpson

he had known was becoming a new person. The old Larry Simpson would dwindle to a distant memory.

"Hey, c'mon," Fletcher yelled.

Simpson drew a deep breath and proceeded toward the remaining exhibits.

By the end of the following week Simpson had adjusted remarkably well to the outside world, so much so that Fletcher no longer felt it necessary to meet at the C&O Building anymore. Instead for today's session they had arranged to meet at a place called New Horizons Research Inc.

"I see you had no trouble getting here," Fletcher said as Simpson approached.

"Not a bit," Simpson boasted, "but what are we here for?" He looked toward the rather unimpressive, low profile, round building.

Fletcher laughed. "Don't let its appearance fool you. New Horizons is one of the top research facilities in the country—in the world for that matter. They cover everything from cloning to nuclear chemistry to communications. Recently they've been conducting some research that promises to revolutionize transportation."

Simpson laughed to himself. Haven't they already done that he thought.

When they entered, they found that everything above ground was nothing more than a large lobby. The research laboratories were all underground. Fletcher explained that it was designed as such to minimize electrical noise interference.

After taking the elevator down to the main research level and making their way through several hallways, they found themselves in a small cluster of offices comprising the department with the intriguing title: "ADVANCED MATTER TRANSPORT SYSTEMS." Simpson conjured up several images of what that title could mean, then dismissed them as too far out.

A small, round faced man came to greet them. "Ah there you are," he said extending his hand to Fletcher "and this would be—"

Larry Simpson, Larry I'd like you to meet Dr. Arjon Kumar."

"Pleased to meet you." They shook hands. Simpson was unusually nervous. He looked at the department sign again and asked "What's a matter transport system?"

"Perhaps I can best explain," Fletcher cut in. "All the transportation systems we have looked at so far, while they might seem quite impressive compared to what you've been accustomed to, they still have fundamental limitations. They require bulky pieces of machinery, guide-ways and vast amounts of resources. The ideal transportation system is one that does not require these things. Dr. Kumar has taken the first step toward achieving that goal."

"My God Tom, you're not talking about matter transmission are you?"

"Sort of" Fletcher answered, then looked at Kumar for support.

"I think we can explain it better in the laboratory" Kumar added.

They passed through a double door at the rear of the office complex and entered a workshop area. To the left was another set of double doors with a sign that read **LEVEL ONE PERSONNEL ONLY**. Simpson gazed at the door for a long moment. He felt a strange chill, then was distracted when Kumar directed them in the opposite direction through a small metal door which opened with a special key. Inside was a large metal-lined room. A healthy sized computer sat behind a glass-walled cubicle. Behind another glass partition were two clear glass cylinders. Inside the first cylinder was a small statue on a pedestal. Inside the second cylinder a similar pedestal stood vacant. Looming over each pedestal was a system of probes, cables and other instrumentation hardware.

A technician made some last minute checks then said, "You're just in time for our next test."

"Good, I think our guest will be very interested in the results." Kumar said, then motioned Simpson to a better viewing position.

"Ready? Here goes." The technician depressed the "ACTIVATE" key. A kaleidoscope of lights danced across instrument panels, then a sparkling mist filled the second cylinder. A smudge appeared

on the pedestal. Simpson strained to improve his vision while the smudge got thicker. He looked toward the first cylinder and could see no change in the statue, yet a second statue was being created in the second chamber.

According to the digital chronometer, 392 seconds elapsed before the experiment was completed. In the second chamber, an exact replica of the statue appeared. Kumar opened the door and walked into the small test compartment where the cylinders were. The others followed. He lifted the glass, picked up the duplicate statue and handed it to Simpson. "Would you like to compare them?"

"Uh—yes, yes I would." Simpson responded.

Kumar handed him the samples, one in each hand. "You must be careful not to mix them up. If you do, there is no way to tell the original from the duplicate....I'd better label the original." He took a marking pen and placed an "X" on the bottom, then handed it back to Simpson.

"They're remarkably similar." Simpson noticed the puzzled look on Kumar. He clarified his comment with a question. "To what level of detail is this process capable of?"

Kumar almost looked offended. "How do you mean what level of detail? It is exactly—"

"What Dr. Kumar is saying," Fletcher cut in, "is that it is an exact duplicate *atom per atom*, down to the minutest imperfections. In a sense one could say the duplicate is the original."

To Simpson it seemed utterly impossible. He tried to calculate the number of atoms in the original. Let's see Avagadros number 6×10^{23} per mole; the statue was about 30 cm^3 in volume; compared to water with a molecular weight of 18....It worked out to about 10^{23} atoms, and each atom had to be precisely located in space. The bandwidth required to transmit this vast amount of information would be enough to support 1000 million million TV channels. he thought about bringing these up to Kumar, then decided he would take the more diplomatic approach.

"How does it work?"

Kumar's face lit up. "It is very complicated, then again it is very simple. Come, I

show you. Up here," Kumar pointed to the array of tubes directed at the pedestal, "we have many x-ray laser sources and under the pedestal are many detectors—"

"X-ray lasers," Fletcher cut in "are the same as optical lasers except their frequency is much higher and most important, they can focus down to much finer detail, in fact right down to an individual atom."

"The detectors determine the position of each atom and the kind of atom it is. The information is then sent to the computer which regulates the assembler." He pointed to the other cylinder.

Simpson stepped over to it and took a closer look. "How does it assemble the atoms?"

"Ah, that is the most difficult part of all" Kumar said proudly. Simpson felt he had hit on the key to the whole process. "All atoms are accelerated through these tubes at precisely the right energy level to the pedestal. Layer by layer the atoms accumulate to duplicate the original—"

Fletcher interrupted. "It's kind of a cross between the vapor deposition and the ion implantation techniques, which you might be familiar with."

Simpson had limited knowledge of those processes but he knew they were used to fabricate semiconductor components. He nodded and let it go at that. He continued inspecting the rest of the apparatus. "This is really something," he said. Kumar glanced at Fletcher and smiled proudly.

Being assured that his compliment was well received, Simpson asked the next question. "How can you transmit such an enormous amount of information?"

Fletcher jumped on the answer—"A very good question. You see this cable." He pointed to the large harness protruding from the top of the first cylinder. "It contains about one million fibers—"

He looked toward Kumar. "Correct me if I'm wrong."

"It is correct what you say," Kumar agreed.

"Each fiber," Fletcher continued, "can transmit 10^{16} bits of information every second. Add them all together and you got all the information you need to completely define the object down to the atomic level."

Simpson expelled a breath of air letting out a WOW. "And you can switch the

beams on and off that fast?"

"Well not exactly, but I better let Dr. Kumar explain the rest to you."

Kumar went on to describe a technique for modulating the x-ray beams and the ultraviolet information trains in the fiber optic bundle. Simpson couldn't understand it all, but he did pick up the gist of it. Apparently they used electrons accelerated between atomic layers in ultrapure crystals—another spinoff of space manufacturing, he assumed. The channel radiation generated from the electrons as well as the electrons themselves, would be modulated by the x-rays scattered by the atoms in the sample. The modulated beam of electrons would in turn switch the ultraviolet beams in the fiber optic bundles. How they managed to keep track of the timing throughout this process involved principles that were beyond his understanding.

Finally at Kumar's suggestion, they left the test area and decided on a cup of coffee. Something was bothering Simpson. He was stunned by the experiment, but there was something else. He felt his heartbeat reverberate and found himself shaking slightly. He couldn't understand why, yet he knew it had something to do with the experiments.

After taking in a snack, they took their coffee back to Kumar's office. It was more lavish than Simpson expected. Kumar dropped into a sumptuous leather chair behind a large rosewood desk and arranged a few items while Fletcher and Simpson took adjacent chairs on one side of a large matching coffee table. The center of the opposite wall was taken up by a large screen. The remainder of the wall had assorted photos, some scenic, others closeups of insects. How odd Simpson thought, that Kumar should be interested in entomology.

Simpson took a sip of coffee and tried to hide the obvious fact that his hand was shaking. He sensed that Kumar and Fletcher knew he was nervous but pretended not to notice. He tried to calm himself by studying the photos on the wall. Suddenly one photo glared at him. It was a photograph of two mice. Within seconds all the other photos took on a new meaning. All the insects in the photos were in pairs.

There were two identical Viceroy butterflies, two Gypsy moths, two ground beetles and at least a dozen other kinds of insects. The shock of what he had discovered momentarily overrode his anxiety. He jumped out of his chair and then took special notice of the paperweight on Kumar's desk. Inside the clear plastic were two identical houseflies.

For some strange reason he was terrified. He turned toward Fletcher, his eyes glaring from a pale face. "You mean they—"

"Yes," Fletcher answered before Simpson could complete the question.

"But they're alive," Simpson insisted. "Your machine can't duplicate consciousness—a soul—"

"I'm afraid our machines have convinced us that consciousness is only a manifestation of a physical structure of matter. Arrange a bunch of molecules in the right configuration and matter develops consciousness. As far as a soul is concerned, well it appears from our tests that the soul is nothing more than an illusion, a feeble attempt by early man to explain what he was incapable of explaining—a kind of cop out."

"No! I can't buy that."

"Your only alternative then is to assume that the matter transporter is also replicating the soul, whatever it may be." Simpson looked toward Kumar who remained silent throughout the discussion as if he were following some prearranged procedure. "Personally," Fletcher continued, "I find the first explanation much easier to swallow. Regardless of what explanation you prefer to believe, the reality of the situation is that the transporter can make a duplicate that is alive."

Simpson remained silent. Even the unexplained anxiety that bordered on terror, never returned. If they were still present, he was too numbed with shock to experience them.

Kumar finally broke the silence. "I think the movies will be helpful."

"Yes, I agree," Fletcher responded. "Larry, we have some actual films of living replications. Would you be interested?"

"Yes, of course," Simpson said, his voice wavering.

Kumar doused the lights and slipped a

cartridge into a slot in his desk. The screen fired up with a succession of insect replication tests. Kumar did his best to narrate all the details. After the second series of tests were shown he stopped the film and turned on the lights. Simpson looked surprised.

Fletcher got up from his chair and slowly walked to the opposite wall. His hands were clasped behind his back while he gazed at the pair of mice, then with a fitting aplomb he turned toward Simpson. "The next part of the film has some very profound implications which I don't think you're going to like. I must admit it came as a shock to me the first time I had seen it, but after awhile one takes these things in stride."

"You see," he continued, "technology often times forces us to change our self image. We can cope with it if it doesn't happen too fast. We usually have advance warning—a time to get used to new development before they happen. In your case, you are getting the brunt of all this with very little warning. The purpose of these experiments was to explore a new approach to transportation. It was never the intention to destroy the concept of a soul or the mystical nature of consciousness. Yet when these questions come up, we must face them squarely."

"But this is not transportation," Simpson said emphatically as if he could avoid the implications by redefining the experiment.

"It's not transportation in the conventional sense," Fletcher went on to explain, "but the difference between transporting ourselves physically or placing an exact duplicate at the desired destination may be insignificant."

"But it is significant," Simpson insisted. "If I send a duplicate across the world, I will know nothing about what the duplicate experienced."

"Maybe so, but we can't even be sure of that. A question has been raised about psychic links when exact duplicates are involved. Suppose the original is destroyed. The duplicate will then carry on as the original. To everyone else including the duplicate it will be as if the original instantaneously flashed across the globe. One can even envision a kind of lateral

form of immortality using this scheme."

Simpson appeared outraged. "Oh, come on! You're going off the deep end on this. The duplicate is isolated from the original. There's a discontinuity in consciousness. For Christ sake Tom, they're separate organisms."

There was what seemed like a long silence, then Fletcher said with a sympathetic calm, "I understand your arguments; hell, we've all gone through these discussions ourselves many times. Right now we just don't know. The philosophers are up in arms about all of this and it'll be some time before they all agree on what's really happening here." Fletcher paused as if trying to remember something. He regarded Simpson carefully, saw increasing signs of anxiety, then remembered what he wanted to say. "As far as the discontinuity or the break in consciousness goes, this happens to all of us everytime we go to sleep. Consider your case. A discontinuity spanned 70 years, but you are still Larry Simpson."

Simpson remained silent to absorb the impact of the last statement. Then Fletcher made one final point. "I should mention that studies—strictly theoretical, I might add—are going on right now that deal with true matter transmission. If an actual device ever comes out of these studies, it would undoubtedly utilize much of the same kind of equipment used here. But if true matter transmission ever became a reality, the subject would have to be killed with a thoroughness that has never been experienced in all of history's bloodiest battlefields. He would literally have to be torn apart down to each fundamental particle. Then he would be reconstructed piece by piece. There is clearly a discontinuity in this act, but emotionally it seems more acceptable because we use the same material. "But should that really make a difference?"

Before the question could be answered, Kumar broke in. "Perhaps we should see the rest of the film."

"Yes, I think so." Fletcher agreed. He looked at Simpson and registered his concurrence.

The film first showed a series of experiments where a duplicate mouse success-

fully made its way through a complex maze that had been mastered by the original, thus establishing that memories are indeed preserved in the duplication process. The remarkable thing was that both the original and the duplicate required exactly the same amount of time, and they seemed to make exactly the same mistakes. Simpson frowned heavily at the results.

In another series of tests, the original and duplicate mice were revived in separate but identical boxes and under identical conditions. At the instant they were revived, both mice made exactly the same moves down to the minutest detail. When the original twitched its nose, so did the duplicate with precisely the same frequency and amplitude. They took the same number of steps across the bottom of the box, they both shook their right hind leg at the same time, both picked up identical pieces of cheese, and both ate the cheese with the same gusto. Kumar explained that the cheese was probably digested molecule for molecule in an identical sequence.

Kumar turned on the lights. "Well there you have it," Fletcher said. "It seems that the age long debate over determinism vs free will has finally ended. There is no free will. These experiments indicate that our actions are simply determined by the molecular configuration in our brains which result from a cumulation of experience and genetics."

Simpson didn't argue the results. The fact that the two mice acted identically was overwhelming proof that they had no choice. There was no reason to assume the same wouldn't also be true for humans. Simpson remained seated with his head in his hands.

"It's really not as bad as it seems at first," Fletcher reassured. "From a practical point of view it doesn't matter whether we have true free will or not. Since we cannot foresee a time when we will be able to understand and predict what the brain's next move will be simply by knowing its current molecular structure, the whole question of free will becomes meaningless. It is the concern of only the purest of philosophers."

Simpson made an odd facial expression, then got up and walked across the office. he stared hypnotically at the photograph of the two mice.

Fletcher glanced at Kumar. His expression was like that of a friend at a funeral. Fletcher wandered slowly about the office with his arms folded. His head was bent downward. "Of course," he said, almost talking to himself, "on a microscopic level there is no such thing as a deterministic event. The uncertainty principle does not allow it. Things only have certain probabilities of happening."

Simpson turned around. "Tom, I need time to think."

"Sure Larry," Fletcher said "We can continue at the next session."

Simpson thanked Dr. Kumar, then left the room and made his way toward the elevator.

"Will he be alright?" Kumar asked.

"Yes, I think so, but I'll check in on him later just to be sure. He's gone through an awful lot."

Kumar sank back in his chair. "It was best that you didn't tell him everything. He could not handle any more."

"Yes, I agree." Fletcher said, then left the office, hesitated for a moment then went through the first set of double doors. He walked across the workshop toward the large double doors on the left. He fumbled in his pocket and found his LEVEL ONE card, inserted it into the slot and spoke into the analyzer. The doors unlocked and Fletcher stepped inside. Amid a vast array of instruments and machinery stood the frozen body of a man inside a glass cylinder. The electro-optical plaque at its base read:

LARRY SIMPSON

Date of Birth November 14, 1948

Deceased June 21, 1983

Cause of Death Lukemia

Across the room a second glass cylinder stood empty. Fletcher took a long look, then left.

WHILE THE STORY is fiction, many of the concepts in the story have already been worked out. The magplane as described was actually presented to the 144th National Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of

Science in Washington, D.C. by Dr. Robert M. Salter of the Rand Corporation. It was estimated that a coast to coast network with several feeder lines would cost about 250 billion dollars in today's money, but once completed, a one way trip from L.A. to New York would cost only \$21. The laser tram has been written up in several technical journals and actual tests have been successfully conducted on a small scale. Today's continuous wave gigawatt lasers are already capable of making the laser tram a reality. It has been estimated that over a one year period, a single laser could place in earth orbit as much payload as that delivered by 2000 Saturn V's.

The space cable has been studied as far back as the 60's. A computer design study conducted by myself and several associates at United Technologies Corp. indicated that the space cable could actually be made to work near the moon with today's materials. Substantial improvements in materials are required before the cable could work in the earth's gravity. It seems reasonable that these materials would be available in the next 50 years or so.

Everything else in the story, with two exceptions, appears feasible within the foreseeable future. The exceptions, of course, are the antigravity device and the matter transport mechanism. The anti-gravity device will first require a better understanding of the nature of gravity. This may happen in the next 20 or the next 200 years. We simply do not know.

As for the matter transport mechanism, while I would like to be more optimistic on this, it seems at this point that the technological problems are so severe that a matter transport device of even a matter replication device as described in the story will be out of reach for at least a century or more.

Still the dream of "instantaneous" transportation might be fulfilled using an altogether different approach. (The term "instantaneous" is put in quotation marks as a reminder that matter transport devices are still limited by the velocity of light.) True transportation means to change your location from one point to

another so that you can interact with the new environment in some manner.

But, suppose we already are at both places, or put another way, suppose our body was widespread enough to encompass every place we could possibly want to be at. Transportation in the usual sense of the term would be unnecessary.

But how is this possible? Let us first take a closer look at ourselves. For the sake of this discussion, we are composed of two parts: a brain and a body. The sole purpose of the body is to supply energy and information to the brain. This can be accomplished in many ways. It just so happens that our bodies are attached to our brain, but this is only an evolutionary convenience—and a dangerous one at that since our brain must be exposed to all the hazards that threaten our body.

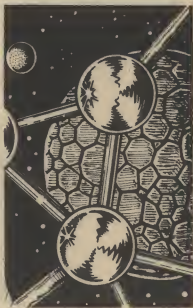
One can easily imagine a society that has decided to avoid this problem by separating their brains from their bodies. The bodies could then transmit any information to the brains through a sophisticated telemetry system as opposed to a nerve cord. Moreover, the bodies need not be organic. The society may opt for a system of machine-like bodies that can see from infrared to x-rays, that can bore its way through solid rock or feel right at home in the vacuum of space. Many separate bodies, perhaps specialized in some manner, could be scattered about collecting information through their five or more senses so the brain can experience far more than is now possible. By a simple thought process, we can be on a tropical beach one instant and skiing in the Swiss Alps the next instant.

Once this happens, a new level of communication will emerge, since any given brain can just as easily experience another's body in lieu of its own. Soon all the bodies will become the collective body and all the brains would be the collective omnipresent brain. And finally, the battle between communication and transportation will end forever. For at this time, transportation and communication will be synonymous. ●

J. Ray Dettinger sends the following update:

"Now that our house building project is completed, I've decided to start on a second science fiction novel based upon one of the concepts discussed in the above story/article. Between chapters, I'll continue to rehearse with the "WHEATSTONE BRIDGE", our five piece rock band specializing in Italian weddings, Irish funerals, and Jewish vasectomy parties.

I almost forgot: For all those interested in taking transportation a bit further out, I just completed an article for SCIENCE DIGEST entitled "The Prospects For Time Travel". It is slated for early 1982."



WAR OF THE WORLDS

H.G. Wells did it first.

Orson Welles did it worst.

George Pal did it best.

The Viking lander laid it to rest.

—Paul Dellinger





Darrell Schweitzer

THE STORY OF A DĀDAR

It was in the time of the death of the Goddess that the thing happened, when the Earth rolled wildly in the dark spaces without any hand to guide it, or so the poets tell us, when Dark Powers and Bright drifted across the land, and all things were in disorder.

It was also in the open grasslands that it happened, beyond the end of the forests, where you can walk for three days due south and come to the frontier of Randelcaine. All was strange to me. I had never been there before, where not a tree was to be seen, anymore than I had been to a place where there are no stars. All that afternoon, my wife Tamda and I drove our wagon through the familiar woods. Slowly the trees began to seem farther apart, and there was more underbrush. I remember how the heat of the day faded quite quickly, and the long, red rays of the setting sun filtered between the trunks, almost parallel to the ground, giving the undersides of the leaves a final burst of color before twilight came on. The trees ahead of us stood in silhouette like black pillars, those behind us, in glory. Above, little birds and winged lizards fluttered in the branches. I reflected that these things had always been thus, even in the earliest times, when the great cities of the Earth's mightier days stood new and shining,

Illustrated by Janet Aulisio

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and other gods and goddesses, the predecessors of the one which had just died, ruled the sky. Those ancients could just as well have been seeing this sunset and this forest through my eyes.

Then a wagon wheel sank axle-deep in mud, and I didn't have time to reflect on anything. The two of us struggled and gasped in pained breaths that we weren't young anymore. Our muscles ached. Sweat ran. Our horse neighed and heaved. If only our son were still with us...But he had gone away to serve the Religion. What is religion when your wheel is stuck?

When at last the wagon rolled free, stars peered down between the branches. The night air seemed very cold. We sat still, panting, until Tamda had the good sense to get our cloaks, lest the chill get into us.

So it was that we emerged from the forest in darkness. At first I was hardly aware that there were no more trees. It seemed merely that there were more stars, but then the moon came up and revealed the vast dark carpet of the plain rising and falling before us. Imagine a fish, which had always inhabited the dark and narrow crags among the rocks at the bottom of the sea, suddenly rising up, into the open wonder of the sea itself. So it was. Overhead the Autumn Hunter was high in the sky. The Polar Dragon turned behind us, and the Harpist was rising. By these signs we knew our way. Neither of us wanted to stop for the night. I suppose plainsmen feel the same way, their first night in the forest. So we pushed on, and shortly before dawn reached our destination.

The village glowed on the plain like a beast with a thousand eyes, reclining there, alive with torches. We would never have found it otherwise. The houses were all curving humps of sod, hollowed out and walled with logs. Had they not been lit, we would have passed them in the night, thinking them little hills.

We were expected. Everyone was awake and waiting. A man in a plumed helmet took our horse by the bridle and led us to a building larger than all the others.

"Are you Pandiphar Nen?" asked the chieftain who stood at the door.

"Yes. You sent for me," I said. "You understand, then, that I do not heal broken bones, or cure any sickness which can be cured with a herb or a little spell?"

"Yes, I do, or I would not have sent for you."

"The price is high."

"Please, bargain later. It is my daughter, sore afflicted. She has...left us. Her mind is in darkness, far underground."

Tamda and I climbed down from the wagon seat. I got my bag out of the back. We were shown inside. The house had but one room, and a fire burned in the middle floor. The smoke hole wasn't large enough, and the air was thick. On a pile of hides to one side a maiden lay, her eyes open, but her gaze distracted. She did not seem aware of us. She rolled her head and muttered to herself. I listened for a moment, catching a few words, but most of it was strange to me.

"Put the fire out," I said to those who had come in with us. "And leave us alone." This was done. I waited for the smoke to clear.

Then I made a mixture of the ground root of the death tree, the water of life, common flour to hold it all together, plus other ingredients, including something called Agda's Toe. Agda was my master, to whom I had been apprenticed when I was fifteen, some thirty years before. Then I had believed he had an infinite supply of toes, which could be regrown whenever he cut them off and sold

them to pharmacies all over the world, but of late I had had my doubts. He never took off his shoes in public.

I ate a spoonful of the mixture and washed it down with wine. I sang the song of the false death, with Tamda at my side to make sure that I did not truly die. She would hold my wrist and take my pulse, counting one heartbeat a minute, and listen for a shallow breath about as often. If I got into trouble she would shout my name and call me back. She alone had this power.

I departed. At once my awareness was out of my body, sharing that of the girl. I saw through her eyes. Tamda and I stood absolutely still, distorted out of shape, like tall sculptures of glowing jade. The room was full of a white mist, and in it swam things like the luminous skeletons of fishes, and some, like impossible herons made of coral sticks, walked on a surface below the floor, wading in the earth. They sang to me, trying to lull me into sleep within a sleep, but I paid them no heed. They were common spirits of the air. I had seen them many times before.

I turned inward. Indeed, the girl's soul was far beneath the earth. I had a sensation of sinking a long way in thick, muddy darkness before I had an impression of a hunched shape, like something carved out of rough, dirty stone, embedded in her.

I began to draw the spirit out. Literally. I drew it. By a trick known only to healers, I was both deep inside the girl's soul and in my own body. I was aware as my hands took up drawing paper and charcoal and began to sketch the image of the spirit. When I was a child I had always had an urge to draw things in the dirt, on walls, hides, scraps of paper, anything, and my father always boxed my ears and told me not to waste my time. But when I began to draw things he had seen in his dreams, and things others saw in theirs, he understood my talent. Everything after that, even my apprenticeship to Agda, was a refinement of technique and nothing more.

I knew what to do from much experience. As my hand moved over the paper, I wrestled with the thing inside the girl. Soon I saw it more clearly, a frog-like king clad in robes of living marble. He had long, webbed claws like a beast, but his face bespoke vast intelligence and age. I understood him to be a creature from some earlier age of the Earth, trying to return now that the Goddess was dead. His eyes seemed to speak to me, saying, "Why should I not have this girl, and walk beneath the sky again?"

"You shall not have her," I said in the language of the dream, and as I spoke, my hand completed the drawing. Then my body got to its feet, stood over the girl, and with a pair of tongs reached into her mouth, pulling out first my spirit, then the other. It was like flying up out of a mountain through a little hole in the top, into my own hand.

"Pandiphar Nen," said my wife, and with the sound I came into myself. I was whole and fully awake. The white mist and the things in it were gone. The task should have been over, the second spirit I'd extracted melted into the air now that I had captured its image.

But the stone king was standing before us. Tamda screamed. It turned to stare into my eyes, and its gaze caught me as surely as any prey is ever charmed by a snake. I was helpless.

"Dadar," it said. "Know that I was placed here to bring this message to you

from worlds beyond the world. I am sent by your creator. Know that you are a dadar, a wizard's shadow and not a man, a hollow thing like a serpent's skin filled with wind, pretending to be a serpent, deluding itself. The master shall make himself known shortly, and then you shall be sent on the task for which he made you, his dadar."

Then, howling, the creature went through the closed door of the house like a battering ram, scattering wood and screaming at the villagers outside.

I was in a daze, only half aware of anything.

"Let us get away from here," Tamda was saying. "They'll think we're witches. Hurry, before they regain their courage. Forget about the payment."

"I don't understand," was all I could say. "It wasn't supposed to happen like that."

She gathered our things and bundled me into the back of the wagon. No one interfered as she drove away from the village.

THE WAGON rattled around me. Sunlight burned through the canvas cover. I lay in the stuffy heat, thinking.

The problem, and the reason I felt so much dread, was that I *did* understand what had happened. My spotty education was more than enough to include everything I needed to know. Some wizard had directed me, his dadar, into that village for his own ends. I knew full well what a dadar was. The world has never been thick with them, but they have been around since the very beginning. They are projections, like a shadow cast by a man standing before a campfire at night, but somehow the shadow is given flesh and breath and a semblance of consciousness. Hamdo, the First Man, made one. He had shaped with his hands the egg from which all mankind was to be born, but while he slept by the River of Life, a toad came along and swallowed it. Then a serpent swallowed the toad and a fox swallowed the serpent, and was in turn devoured by a lion, which fell prey to a bull, which was eaten by a dragon, which in turn was swallowed by an Earth Thing for which there is no name, which before long found itself residing in the belly of a Sky Thing which remained similarly nameless. Therefore Hamdo climbed the mountain on which the sky turns, charmed the Sky Thing to sleep with his singing—for he was the greatest of all singers—and then, on the mountaintop, he made a dadar of himself, and put a feather in one of its hands and a burning torch in the other. He sent it inside the Sky Thing to make it regurgitate the Earth Thing, the dragon, the bull, the lion, and so forth. From inside the toad it cut itself free, rescuing the egg. Things were different in those days, I suspect. Animals don't eat like that now. But the dadar was still a dadar, a reflection in the mirror of Hamdo.

More recently, the philosopher Telechronos spent so much time brooding among the ruins of the Old Places that he nearly went mad. He made a dadar for company. It became his leading disciple.

And a king of the Heshites was found to be a dadar. The priests gathered to break the link between the dadar and its master, lest some unseen, malevolent wizard lead the country to doom. The link was broken and the king crumbled into dust. A dadar is an unstable, insubstantial thing, like a collection of dust motes blown into shape by the wind.

Thus I feared every sound, every movement, every change in the direction of the wind, lest these be enough to unmake me. All the confidence I had gained

in the years of my life ran away like water. I was nothing. An illusion, even to myself. A speck of dust drifting between the years.

I wept like a child abandoned in the cold and the dark.

And I argued: can an illusion weep? Can its tears make a blanket wet? But then, how could I, with the senses of a dadar, know the blanket to be real, or the wagon, or the tears?

I looked up front and saw only the horse nodding as it walked, and Tamda huddled at the reins. I did not speak to her, nor did she turn to speak to me. I think she was nearly as afraid as was I.

And I argued: But I have sired two sons. Two? One died when the cold of winter settled into him and spring did not drive it forth, but even in death he was real. He did not vanish like a burst bubble. And the other—he lives yet. Just this year he was called by a voice within him to journey south to the holy city of Ai Hanlo. I walked with him a long way, then wept when he passed from sight around a bend in the forest path. Does this not make me a man?

I was back to weeping. All roads-of thought seemed to lead there.

I looked up again and saw that the sky was beginning to darken.

"Stop," I said to Tamda, and she reined the horse. She was trembling as we made camp. We went through the motions of settling down to supper, but suddenly she was in my arms and sobbing.

"Please...don't go away. Don't leave me. I'm too old to learn to be without you."

I was sobbing too. "I love you. Does that not make me a man? How can I prove it? Can a shadow feel such a thing?"

"I don't know. What is going on? Are we both mad?"

"No, it isn't that. I'm sure."

"I wish it were. To be mad is to be filled with passion, and at least that's real."

Although both of us were tired and hungry, we made love there on the ground as the stars came out. But even as I did I was haunted by the thought that a shadow may make a shadow's love and know nothing better."

Later, it was Tamda who put into words what I was groping for. She gave me a plan for action.

"You must find this wizard whose dadar you are," she said, "and kill him. Then you'll be free. You won't fade away. I'm sure of it. We must go to him when he summons you." She took a sheathed knife and put it inside my shirt. "When the tide comes, surprise him."

Then I got up and fetched my folio of drawing paper. I sat down beside her and paged through the book. I stopped to stare at the image of the frog king. I couldn't help but admire the artistry. It was good work. When I wasn't practicing my more esoteric skill, I simply drew. Sometimes I sold the pictures in towns we passed through. Sometimes I even sold the ones I'd made while healing, after the spirits were dispersed and we didn't need them anymore.

I began to draw. I closed my eyes and let my hand drift. It didn't seem to want to make any marks. I felt my hand slide along the page, the charcoal only touching paper seven—eight?—nine times?

Then I opened my eyes and saw that I'd made a fair outline of the Autumn Hunter, which sinks lower and lower in the southern sky as the year ends.

"We travel south," I said.

WHEN FIRST I looked over the plain by day, I thought of the fish from the deep ocean crags—now bursting out of the water altogether, into the air. As far as I could see, green and brown grasses rippled beneath the sun. Here and there stood a scrubby tree. A herd of antelopes grazed far away. Once we passed quite near to a green-scaled thing walking upright on thin legs, fluttering useless wings in annoyance at our presence. It stood twice as tall as a man, but looked harmless, even comical. I had heard of such creatures, half-shaped, still forming. They are said to emerge whenever one age ends and another begins. I had heard they were commoner in the south, as if the strangeness radiated from the holy city of Ai Hanlo, where the actual bones of the Goddess lay.

The journey was comforting. I relished every new experience more than I had any since I was a boy. But then the melancholy thought arose that it was only because I was about to lose these things, all sensations, all perception, even my very self, that they seemed more rare and exquisite.

Tamda slept in the back of the wagon while I drove. Horses are supposed to be able to detect supernatural creatures pretending to be men, but ours behaved normally for me.

The plain was divided by a winding silver line, which I knew to be the Endless River. It was said to engirdle the world. My son said he would follow it on the way to the holy city. I stopped by the bank to water the horse and to bathe. Tamda awoke and prepared a soup with river water. Later, I took up pen and paper and began to draw.

She watched me intently.

"Is it a message from our enemy?"

It wasn't. A bird bobbing on a reed had caught my fancy, and I made a picture of it. It was a charming little sketch, the sort some rich lady would pay well for.

Later, in a town called Toradesh, by a bend in the river, a man came to us, begging that we rid his father of the spirit which possessed him. There were many people around, and I could not refuse. Tamda and I were shown into a basement room, where an old man was kept tied to a bed. His eyes were wide with his madness. He did not blink. There was foam at the corners of his mouth. He stank of filth.

The picture I drew was of a long flight of stairs, winding down into the darkness. Once I had departed from my body, I was on those sodden, wooden stairs, descending into a region of dampness and decay. At the bottom I waded knee-deep in mud until I came to a slime-covered door. I pulled on an iron ring to open it, but the wood was so soft that the metal came away in my hand. I kicked the hole thus begun until it was big enough for me to wriggle through.

On the other side something massive and hunched over, dark with glowing eyes, sat nearly buried in the muck.

"Begone!" I said. "I command you, leave this place. Be vomitted up and leave this man!"

The thing turned to me and laughed. Its voice was that of a child, but hideous, as if the child had never grown up, but lost all innocence and wallowed in cruelty for a thousand years.

"Gladly would I leave, *dadar*, for the soul of this man is rotten and there is not much left of it. But you have no soul, so where would I go?"

"If I have no soul, what is this standing before you?"

"It is the *dadar* of a *dadar*, the image of an image, the rippling of water made

by another wave. *Dadar*, *Etash Wesa* made you, and sends you as a present to his brother, *Emdo Wesa*. There is enmity between them, which you shall consummate. More than that you need not know. Your actions are his, your thoughts his. From now on, he shall guide you."

In the blinking of an eye I was back in the basement room, and the old man was mad as ever. *Tamda* let out a startled cry. She had not called me. The townspeople scowled and muttered something about "theatrical fake." *Tamda* tried to calm them. We had failed, she told them, and thus would demand no payment. We left the town at once. It may have only been the subtle and remote workings of *Etash Wesa*, directing my fate, which prevented us from being smeared with dung and driven out with rods. Someone mentioned that as the traditional punishment for frauds.

I WAS DRIFTING. Sometimes in a dream I would see a hill or a bend in the road or men poling a raft along the river. Sometimes I would draw pictures of these things, or awaken to find that I had drawn them. Especially in these cases, when the image was firmly in my mind, I could be sure that sooner or later I would behold those things while waking. I drove the wagon when I could, letting instinct which I knew to be the instructions of my make be my guide.

I didn't have any doubt now that I truly was a *dadar*, a thing like dust carried in the wind. I was going to confront *Emdo Wesa*. Then what? Would some other secret of my nature be revealed?

Once I fancied that in the presence of *Emdo Wesa* I would explode into flame, consuming both of us. For this purpose alone I had been created. The rest was random happenstance.

Tamda said little as the miles went by. She knew she was losing me. Sometimes when she did speak she mentioned things I could not recall at all, as if I were slipping away from myself, becoming two, real and unreal, a reflection again reflected.

I awoke in the middle of the day, the reins at my feet. The horse had wandered to the side of the road to graze, pulling the wagon askew. How had I gotten there? I didn't remember any morning. Last I remembered, we were travelling nearly into the sunset. *Tamda* was asleep in the back.

I had a vision of a man in an iridescent robe, bent over a steaming pot. I could not see his face. His back was toward me. He was missing the last three fingers of his right hand. With thumb and forefinger only he reached into the pot, immersing his arm all the way to the shoulder—and yet the pot wasn't a third that deep—and as he did there was a scratching inside my chest, as if a huge spider within me began to stir. I gagged. It was coming up my throat, into my mouth.

There it retreated back inside me and there was a sudden, intense pain. It had wrapped its legs around my heart, and was squeezing, until blood rushed to my temples and my head and chest were about to—

I AWOKE WITH a scream. A flock of startled birds rose all around me, wheeling in the twilight of early dawn.

I was sitting by a campfire in the middle of the grassland. There was no sign of *Tamda* or the wagon.

Flames crackled. There was no other sound except that of the birds. I let out a grunt of surprise.

"What's the matter? Don't you know where you are?"

I looked up, regarding the speaker, saying nothing. He stood opposite me, a spear with a rabbit impaled on it in his gloved hands. He had a long beard, brown hair streaked with grey, and he wore a long robe alternately striped blue and red. For an instant I feared he was the man from my vision, but by the way his hands worked, spitting the rabbit over the fire, I was sure he had all his fingers. I guessed him to be slightly younger than myself, and by his speech, a foreigner. He seemed to take my presence for granted, as if we had met before this instantly. Carefully, trying not to reveal the gaps in my memory, I got him to tell me what I wanted to know.

"You may have heard of my country," he said. "Here in the north the people say the air is so thick in Zabortash that men carry it around in buckets, into which they dunk their heads when they want to breathe. They blame our foul dispositions on this. But these things are slanderous lies. Am I not a man, like any other? He smiled when he spoke, and felt sure he was deliberately mocking me. This was a new terror, but I forced myself to remain calm. I allowed that he seemed a man, like any other.

"Now you, on the other hand," he went on, "seem strange. Last night when you came upon my humble camp, you were like one walking in his sleep. 'Who are you?' you asked, and I said 'I am Kabor Asha,' but a few minutes later you asked again, and again I answered, and it seemed that your mind wandered even farther than your body did. Most strange."

He offered me some of the rabbit. When we were done eating, he noticed that I was watching him as he wiped his gloves clean, without removing them.

"You are wondering why I don't take them off and wash them, of course. I can't, you see, because I am not alone. In my country no magician bares his hands in public. It's obscene."

"You are...a magician?"

"That's another rumor they have here in the north, that everyone in Zabor-tash is a magician. It's not true, but there are so many that there is no work for many. That is why I wander, you see, to practice my art."

And again I wondered if he were mocking me, but I made no sign. An idea came to me. Another magician could help me against my enemy. At the very least, it would complicate Etash Wesa's plans. So words poured out of me in a torrent. I was well into my story before I realized what I was doing. Then there was nothing to do but finish. I told him all.

"I know of Emdo Wesa," he said when I had finished. I can take you to him. Then the whole unpleasant business will be over and you'll be free."

"Wait! What business? What am I supposed to do? Who are you? How do you know—?"

Before I could do anything he stood over me. He had opened his robe. Beneath he wore some sort of armor. The scales glittered blue and black, close against his skin. I had a sudden fear that it wasn't armor at all, that he was some kind of reptile—

The cloak closed over me, covering my head as he knelt to embrace me, hugging me to his chest.

His flesh was cold and hard as iron. I couldn't feel any heart beating.

"Help! Wait! Where is my wife? What have you done—?"

"You didn't tell me you had a wife," he said as he pushed me over backwards and tumbled onto me.

The ground did not catch us. We were falling off a precipice, tumbling over and over in the air, the wind roaring by us, for a long time. I screamed and struggled, and then all the strength went out of me and I hung limp. He straightened out from our hunched position and stopped somersaulting. I could see nothing but darkness beneath his cloak, but somehow I had the impression that he bore me in his arms like a bird of prey carrying off a fish.

The fish, from out of the crag, wandering into the wide ocean, bursting into the air, snatched away by a sea hawk—

—falling among faint lights, false images behind my eyelids, but then stars, as pure and clear as any seen by night over the open plain, as if Kabor Asha had all the universe inside him.

We stopped falling without any impact or even a sense of motion. My vertigo simply faded slowly away, and after a time I felt solid ground beneath my feet.

He took his robe off me, and I saw that we stood on a little hill before a vast city which rose up tier upon tier, like something carved out of a mountain. Every stone, every wall, every rooftop of it was of dull black stone, and it stood silent and empty against a steel grey sky. As far as I could see the ground was bare and dusty grey. Every color, every trace of life seemed drained out of this place.

"Behold the holy city of Ai Hanlo," said my guide and captor, "where lie the bones of the Goddess. But this is not the Ai Hanlo to which pilgrims flock, where the Guardian rules over half a million citizens. No, this is one of the shadows of the city, in a world of shadows. Where the bones of the Goddess lie all magic intersects, all powers are centered. All shadows come together here, branching out into separate worlds. Thus, in a sense, all practitioners of deepest magic, not that petty and shallow stuff you yourself use, the sort you can see on any streetcorner in Zabortash, but the deepest, most secret magic, which partakes of the inner nature of things; all who know this and immerse themselves into it—all these dwell in Ai Hanlo, alone, in some shadow or other, where ordinary men cannot follow. In this particular shadow Emdo Wesa dwells. You must go to him."

I looked up at the city in dread. It was no city, but some monster, waiting to devour me in the labyrinths of its mouth, to dissolve me utterly.

Dadar though I was, if I had any will, I would resist.

I ran down the hill, away from the city, away from the one who called himself Kabor Asha.

"Stop! Fool!"

The spider in my chest scurried to my heart and squeezed and sank its fangs deep. I screamed once, but the sound broke into gurgling, and the pain filled me.

The next thing I knew, the Zaborman was helping me to my feet. I was numb and weak. I could not fight him.

"Don't try to run away," he said. "Listen to me. I can still help you. I can be your friend."

"Who are you really? You didn't find me just by chance."

"No, I did not. Let me merely say that I am one who wants to see you

complete your mission and go free. I want to help you do what Etash Wesa has sent you to do, and get it over with."

"You seem to know what I must do."

"Yes, I do. It is quite simple. You will find him sleeping. Reach beneath his pillow and take out the jewelled dagger you find there. With it, cut his throat from ear to ear."

"Why should I murder a man I do not know, with whom I have no quarrel?"

"Because you were created for that very reason. Be comforted. You have no more guilt in this than does the dagger."

"That's very comforting," I said bitterly. "What happens to me afterwards?"

"In all honesty, I do not know. You could go on for a while, the way ripples do in a pool, even after the stone that made them comes to rest on the bottom. If so, take that as reward for services rendered."

So, filled with helpless dread, like a victim led to slaughter, even though I was supposed to do the slaughtering, I let him guide me through the dark gate of this shadow Ai Hanlo, through the wide squares, up streets so steep that steps were cut in them, below gaping, empty windows, to that gate beyond which, in the real city, no common man was allowed to go. But no guards stopped us, and we entered the inner city, the vast complex containing the palace of the Guardian and—in all the shadows too?—the bones of the Goddess resting in holy splendor. All the while the air was still and dry, not warm, not cold, giving no sensation at all. there was an overwhelming odor of must, like that of a tomb which had not been opened for a dozen centuries. We came to the topmost part of the palace, the very summit of the mountain, to a great chamber beneath a black dome. In the true city the dome was golden, and was said to glow with the sunset hours after the rest of the world was dark.

In that vast, empty room, by the faint light of the grey sky coming in through a skylight, I could make out two vast mosaics on the floor, one of a lady dressed in black, with stars in her hair, and another, of the lady's twin, in flowing white, with a tree in one hand and the blazing sun in the other. The Goddess, in her bright and dark aspects, as she was before she fell from the heaven and shattered into a million pieces, which we know as the Powers.

Where the feet of the two images came together, there was a dais, and on it a throne. A man sat there asleep, his head on an armrest. I had expected him in a bed, the pillow beneath his head. But, no, he was sitting on it.

We crept closer, climbing the few steps until we stood by the throne. We stood over the sleeping man. He was very thin. I could not make out his features.

"Take the dagger, and do what you must," said Kabor Asha, and as he spoke he stepped down from the dais. "Do it!" he whispered to me. "Hurry! Fear not; it is a magic weapon, the only one which can pierce him. Now carefully draw it out."

The hilt was sticking out from beneath the pillow. Delicately, I took hold of it and inched it away. The task was easier than I had expected. The thing slid out of a scabbard, which remained beneath the pillow. Once I froze in abject terror as my victim's eyelids fluttered, but he did not wake.

"Do what you must!"

I felt as if I were about to slay myself, as if the first prick of the blade would burst me like a bubble. But then I told myself, well, I had been created for this. What years I had lived, I had lived. What man can avoid his appointed doom?

My life is done, I thought. There are more painful ways to die than merely winking out of existence.

I took the sleeping man firmly by the hair, and quickly, savagely, before he could react, I slashed his throat so deeply that I felt the blade touch his neck bone.

I winced, and braced myself for oblivion, but nothing happened.

Nothing.

There was no blood from the open throat. Only a little dust dribbled from the wound, and the body deflated, like a punctured waterbag, until it was no more than a crumpled mass.

The one who had brought me here ascended the dais again.

"What does this mean?" I asked. "Why doesn't he die like a man?"

"I can explain. Give me the knife."

Without thinking, I gave it to him.

He slammed it hilt-deep into my heart.

There was—

—I—

—the beginning of pain; a scream, my knees like running sand—

—stood still. He held me up, impaled on the blade, frozen forever in an impossible dance of death.

"Dadar," he said. "I can explain. He does not die like a man because he is not a man. He is a thing like a dadar, like you. A reflection of a reflection. You have killed one of your own number. Dadar, it is all clear to you when you know that I am Emdo Wesa, the one my brother sent you to murder."

HEARING CAME first. Footsteps. The sound of a small metal instrument being dropped into a glass jar. Breathing. Slowly, images coalesced out of the air. Bright areas became torches set in a wall. A drifting smear became a more unified shape, and wore the face of Emdo Wesa, whom I had known as Kabor Asha the Zaborman.

Was he with me, even beyond death?

I shook my head to clear it, and was aware of my body. I was spread-eagled to a table, and was stripped to the waist. Emdo Wesa, holding a sharp knife, bent over me. Impossibly because I felt no pain, there was an immense, gaping hole in my chest. I felt sure he could have ducked his head into it. And yet, I was numb, and blood did not spurt out. I watched almost with disinterest, as if all were part of a remote pageant performed by spirits in some other plane of existence. In the shadows.

"You know," laughed the wizard, seeing that I was awake, "You could say it was obvious from the beginning that my brother had a hand in this."

He put down the knife and reached into the cavity. His gloves were off and I could see that he indeed lacked three fingers. In the place light flickered.

He drew out a severed hand, totally covered with blood. From out of my chest. He took a ring off one of the fingers, then threw the hand away like so much garbage.

"Yes," he said, examining the ring. "It is my brother's hand. His last one. he used the other to make another dadar. How long ago was that? I don't remember. Oh, I should tell you something. To make a dadar, the wizard must

cut off a piece of his living flesh. You have to amputate something. Dadars are not made frivolously. So far I have had but three enemies I could not otherwise deal with, and each cost me a finger to make a dadar. But my brother, I believe, is more quarrelsome. He has lots of enemies. He has changed himself hideously. I won't tell you the cause of our feud, because it would go on and on, and I don't care to spend that much time doing so, but I will say this. The world, all the worlds, would be better off without him. He is a monster."

"M—monster..."

Emdo Wesa smiled and said softly, "Don't strain yourself, my friend. Don't try to speak."

"Who...? Friend...?"

"Now you have a good mind, for a dadar. I must compliment my brother on his workmanship. Or you shall, when you see him. You are so full of questions. Let me set your mind at rest and answer a few. First, know that sorcery changes the sorcerer. Every act makes him a little less a part of the human world. It has to be done with moderation. Otherwise, like my brother, one will drift like an anchorless ship, far, far into strangeness. He has. I don't think his mind works at all like a human one anymore. But he is still clever. Why did he create you, and let you live unsuspecting for forty-five years before using you? It is because I have long journeyed outside of time, and forty-five years in this world has no duration outside. When I looked back into time, to see how things were going, at a point years ahead of where I departed, I saw you killing me in my sleep. It was no illusion, but a true thing. So I had to arrange for another to die in my place. *That* was what I had seen. Then I was able to come back some days before the event, encounter you, and make sure things occurred as planned. Thus my brother was thwarted."

Fear, nausea, and delirium washed over me. I felt like I would vomit out my insides, but nothing came. I screamed my wife's name.

"Tamda is not with you anymore," said Emdo Wesa. "It is useless to call her."

He reached somewhere beyond the range of vision and came back with a still beating heart in his hands.

"No... Tamda! You—monster!"

"Calm yourself. Calm yourself. I didn't say where I got this. It is for you, that you might live." He placed it in my chest. "You don't think I...no, how could you? I am not some inhuman fiend like my brother. I am a man, like anyone else. I am human. I have feeling. I can perceive beauty, know sorrow and joy. I haven't lost that. *I am moved by compassion.* I know what love is, even the love of a dadar."

His breath came out like smoke. By the light of the torches I could see that what I had taken to be tight-fitting scale armor was really his flesh. His three ghostly fingers flickered as he sewed up the wound.

I screamed again.

He walked along the table, toward my face, the knife in hand once more.

I THOUGHT that my being on the hill outside the shadow city, with Emdo Wesa beside me, was all a dream, something conjured by my desperate mind in my last moments of life. But the scene had duration, and I felt hard ground beneath me, and I touched my body and found that it was real. I groped under my shirt and encountered a tender spot, where the wound had been closed and

still had a thread holding it. Much to my surprise I also encountered the dagger my wife had given me. Obviously my new master had nothing to fear from ordinary blades.

One side of my face tingled. There was something subtly wrong with my vision, as if one eye perceived things more intensely than did the other.

I looked at Emdo Wesa. He had a bandage over one side of his face, covering an eye.

Again I was a dadar.

"I am returning you to my brother," he said. "I shall see everything you see and do. When the time comes, I shall direct you. When your task is completed, I promise you, I shall release you."

"How can I ever believe that?"

"Why, you have my word, as a human being."

THERE IS another gap in my memory here. I made to answer, but when I looked up I saw a clear, blue sky. Surf crashed nearby, and the air was filled with spray. I was no longer in the shadow land, but on a beach somewhere in the real world, on a bright, chilly day, and the wizard was no longer with me.

I had come to the ocean. I had looked upon lakes before, and rivers, but never the ocean. I had only heard of it, from those who had travelled far. Water stretched to the horizon, a vast array of whitecapped waves marching toward me like the ranks of some endless army, only to break into foam at my feet. The wonder of it almost overcame the terror of what had gone before. For this, it was almost worth what I had endured. Perhaps, I thought, I had gone mad, and had imagined all that had gone before in my madness, and in my distracted state wandered over the world until at last I came to the shore of the sea. That was how I had come here.

But then I saw that there were no footsteps in the sand. I walked up a step, and then there was a single set. I was not wet, so I had not come out of the waves, to have my tracks washed away behind me. No, I had been deposited here, out of the air.

When I pulled up my shirt, I saw the closed wound on my chest, red and swollen, the end of the black thread sticking out of it. It hurt when I breathed deeply.

Everything was true. I could not weep. All the salt water in creation was before me, so what would my tears amount to? Besides, I had expended them all before.

Besides, a dadar is not a man, and his tears are all illusions.

I prayed to the bones of the Goddess, wherever they might be, and I called on the Bright Powers, repeating the names of them that I knew. But what are the prayers of a dadar?

Then I knelt down and began to draw in the wet sand. My hand moved by itself. Only when I realized what I was doing did I take out my dagger and use it as a stylus.

I made a crude outline. It was only a suggestion of a shape, and there were no colors to it, of course, but somehow this act set my senses spreading like smoke over the land and sea. I felt every wave in its rising, every grain of sand pressing against the rest, here concealing a shell, there a stone. I felt the chill of the great depths and the crushing currents beyond the reach of the sun. I heard the long

and ancient song of the whales, a fragment of that single, endless poem which the leviathans have called out to one another since the beginning of the world. I seemed to pass out of my body for a while. There was no sensation. Then came a vague sense of direction, as if I were being led by invisible hands to the edge of an abyss.

I became aware of the drawing again. It had grown far more elaborate. My gaze drifted from it to the sky, and I saw that the sky was no longer blue, but a vivid, burning red, and I looked out over the ocean, which was now an ocean of blood, new and thick and spurting from some torn artery as huge as creation.

An object broke the surface near the horizon. It was little more than a speck, but it grew larger as it neared me, moving like a ship even though it had no sail or oarsmen to propel it. It was a rectangular box, rising and falling in the waves of blood, drawing ever nearer the shore, until I could discern quite clearly that it was a coffin of intricate and antique workmanship, embossed in gold and covered with strange hieroglyphs.

My will was not my own. Of its own volition my body rose and waded into the sea, till blood rose above my waist. My mind wanted to flee, but there, helpless, until the coffin was within arm's reach. Then it ceased to rise and fall, but remained perfectly still, oblivious to the movement of the waves around it. I watched with the terror of inevitability, like some prey cornered by the hunter when there is no further place to run, as the lid silently rose. Within was darkness, not merely an absence of light, but a living, substantial thing.

And slowly this darkness faded, and my new eye penetrated it. I saw Etash Wesa, the enemy against whom I had been sent, the one who had remained on earth for so long, never venturing out of time, the one who had fought so many feuds with so many enemies.

Indeed, by the look of him, Etash Wesa had made many, many dadars. His almost shapeless pink bulk floated inside the coffin, awash in blood, slowly turning over. In the gouged-out bulk which had been a head, there was an opening—I couldn't call it a mouth—which mewed and babbled and spat blood when it rose above the surface. One stubby remnant of an arm twitched like a useless flipper. And yet, this was no helpless thing. Sometimes I knew it was almost infinitely aware and powerful, and that it had grown far, far away from the humanity that spawned it, until it no longer saw or felt as men did. I think it touched my mind then, and its presence was an intense, exquisite torture beyond the ability of words to describe or the mind to conceive. No one thought can encompass the mind of Etash Wesa.

In its twisted way, with something other than a voice, it seemed to be saying, "My dadar? Where is my dadar? I have been separated from it, and yet I shall find it."

The greatest terror of all those I had known was that Etash Wesa would indeed find me. I could look on him no more. Somehow I could move again. Screaming, I stumbled onto the beach. I obliterated the drawing. I covered my eyes with my hands. I pounded my head to drive out the memory of what I had seen, but still the red sky looked down on me, the sea of blood washed at my feet, and the thing in the coffin murmured.

I picked up my knife out of the sand. If I lived not another instant it would be preferable to living in the sight of Etash Wesa. What did I care of my promised freedom? What did I care of strange wars between wizards? What did I care,

even if the world would be better off rid of Etash Wesa?

I did what I had to. I gouged out the eye Emdo had given me. If it had burst like a bubble then, it would have been a blessed escape.

I heard Emdo's voice for an instant: "No! Stop!" Then he was gone. The pain was real. The blood ran down my face. I gasped, and fell onto the sand, and lay there, panting, bleeding, waiting for the end to come.

I waited for a long time. The sun set and the stars came out. The salt tide went out and came back in again, nudging seaweed against my feet.

The rest is a muddle, a fever dream within a dream within a dream. I think someone found me. I remember walking along a road for a time. there was a bandage over my empty socket. a few words, a song, a carriage wheel creaking and rustling through dry leaves. I think I lay for a day beneath the hot sun in the middle of a harvested field. A boy and several dogs came upon me, then ran away in fright when I sat up.

Somehow I came to Ai Hanlo, the real city, where the Guardian rules, where the bones of the Goddess lie in holy splendor at the core of Ai Hanlo Mountain. I remembered slowly—my mind was clouded, my thoughts like pale blossoms drifting to the surface—that my son was here, that he had come to serve the Religion. I went to the square of the medicants, beneath the wall where the Guardian comes all draped in gold and silver to bless the crowds. I slept with the sick and lame. Somebody stole my boots. So, barefoot, tattered, stinking, my face a running sore, I went to the gate of the inner city and demanded to see my son. But the soldiers laughed and sent me away. I begged, but they would not call for him.

But what is the begging of a dadar?

I prayed to whatever forces or Powers there might be, to the remaining wisps of holiness that might linger over the bones of the Goddess, but what good are the prayers of a dadar?

What good? At the very end, when I sat in a doorway very near to death, a gate opened and a procession of priests came out, and I saw a face I knew, and I pushed through the crowd with the last of my strength. I called my son's name and he stopped, and recognized me, and wept at my wretchedness. He took me to his rooms and comforted me, and later I told him that above all else I wanted to rejoin Tamda, his mother, my beloved, if she would have me, knowing me to be a dadar, without a soul, an uncertain thing.

"But Father," my son said, "consider what uncertain things all men are. What is a man, but a bubble in the foam, a speck of dust on the wind? Can any man know that his next breath will not be his last? Can he know how fortune will treat him, even tomorrow? What of the calamities that carry him off, or the diseases, or even that one, faint breath of damp midnight air which touches his old bones and makes an end to him? Then what? Do we walk a long road till at last we come to the paradise at the top of the world, there hear forever the blessed music of the Singer? Or do we merely lie in the ground? You think these are strange words these are, coming from me. But the Goddess is dead, and the last remnants of her holiness quickly drain away. All things are uncertain. The world is uncertain. Will the sun rise tomorrow? Father, you are weeping. How can a mere projection, an empty thing like a skin filled with wind—how can such a thing weep? It may deceive itself, but not others. I see your tears. I know that you are more than a sudden, random, fleeting shape, as much as any man is.

Yes, a man. If you were not always a man, I think you have become one over the years through your living and your love."

Which brings me back to weeping.

When at last I was able to travel from Ai Hanlo, my son went with me. We followed the way Tamda's wagon was said to have gone, asking after her in every town. She made a few coins singing, people said, or selling sketches or doing sleight of hand. She looked thin and worn, they said.

At last we found her at a crossroads. It had to be more than just chance. She leapt down from the wagon and ran to me. Again we all three wept.

Later she said to me, "We are always uncertain. If you fade away, so shall I, when we are old. It may be very sudden. How are you unlike any man in this? Stay with me. Let the days pass one at a time, and live them one at a time. You can love. How are you unlike any man in this?"

Which brings me back to weeping. ●

Darrell Schweitzer

Schweitzer has been a steady contributor to both Amazing and Fantastic in recent years with fiction and well-known author interviews (see his conversation with Charles L. Grant in this issue). In a letter last fall he had this latest to say about his continuing utterances on "The Meaning of Life".

"I actually now am in the odd position that I have virtually no unsold fiction. (Except) Alan Ryan (is considering) a story called 'The Meaning of Life' which I

did with his Perpetual Light (religious themed sf anthology) in mind. In one version the guru was named The Reverend Som Tow (after sf writer, rival 'MOL' ideologist Somtow Sucharitkul). At Disclave last spring, each midnight there were 'Readings of Unmitigated Horror' and I gave an impromptu reading of this thing in Somtow's presence without warning him.....he only turned slightly green."



One Entropic Evening

One entropic evening,
the universe at heat death,
the two of us together.

Our candle's flame does not flicker.
The night moth frozen in its flight.
The end of time is now.

No sun will rise tomorrow;
the starless dark will never fade;
we'll never have to say goodbye.

—Darrell Schweitzer

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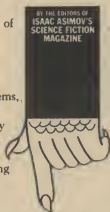
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Barry N. Malzberg

Anderson

He is elected President of the United States by an overwhelming margin. A mandate. Fifty-eight percent of the popular vote, five hundred and twelve votes in the electoral college. Inexplicably, his opponent wins Nebraska. On the day after the election, Bitters whooping in the huge suite says that the first action of the administration will be to settle with those hayseeds.

Anderson looks at him quizzically. "I don't want to punish anyone."

"What the hell," Bitters says, "don't you have any sense of humor?"

"I have a gloomy premonition that we will soon look back on this troubled moment as a golden time of freedom and licence to act and speculate. One feels the steely sinews of the tiger, an ascetic 'moral' and authorization reign of piety and iron."

Robert Lowell: 1967

Winding down. Everyone knows that it is on the line now, this is the time when men and boys get separated. It is a time for greatness. Fourth and one on the ten yard line, thirty-six seconds left on the stadium clock, no time-outs, game hanging in the balance. Anderson perches over the center, his eyes filled with alertness, his chest heaving with the excitement of it all, the lacerating cold turning warm inside, each exhalation truly a burst of fire. He has never felt so alive at this moment when truly he is dead, the ball coming into his hand, he scurries and sees the middle linebacker shooting through unblocked, coming upon him, eyes huge. Anderson gives an *eh!* of woe and cocks the ball for a desperation pass, try and get it into the end zone anyway but his foot slips and even before the linebacker hits him he feels himself falling to the hard astroturf and then the man is upon him, grunting.

Even as the horn sounds, Anderson hears not only the game but all circumstance spilling from him. He knew that it was going to be very difficult but could not surmise that it was going to be like this. Not quite. Sounds are all around him as he spirals out. Down and out. Game to go on the two. In coma, he hears the sound of engines.

Anderson, awakening from an unrecollected dream of loss, plots his moves, considers his fortune, then opens his eyes to look at the lustrous plaster of the bedroom as his wife tumbles all over him. This is not characteristic of Sylvia. Petulant, demanding, she seizes him. Wearily, he commits himself. Foreign policy, ceremonial pens, the medal of freedom, state banquets, it is just another of the obligations of office.

Sylvia is inflamed by the idea of touching a President: she has never shown so much interest in the act as in this last year. Anderson does as he can, serves as he will, utters oaths of office, does as he must, holds to the center. He is a moderate. Sylvia capsizes upon him mumbling. Anderson charts his own release, thinking of IBCM's as convulsively, absently, he climaxes.

Anderson lights a cigarette calmly and blows out the match, tosses it, inhales, then in a single graceful motion pushes in the swinging doors of the Circle Bar and walks through. In the poisoned darkness the two Lump brothers stand glaring at him, hands on their holsters. Half-consumed whiskey bottles stand behind them over the deserted bar. The bartender has dived for cover, the customers, no fools they, have filched out a side door. "All right," Anderson says, "this is it. One at a time or both of you, I don't care."

"Taste lead," Tom, the older one says. His gun is in his hand and poised to fire when Anderson shoots him in the wrist. Tom Lump shrieks and falls. His point thirty-eight clatters to the crude surface of the bar.

"Next," Anderson says, the gun cocked, drawing down on Charles. The tall Lump stares at him; his eyes shift, his expression weakens. Slowly he raises his hands.

"I'll take you on with fists," Anderson offers, "right outside. Let's go."

On the floor Tom whimpers. "Listen," Charles says carefully, "we don't want any trouble here. You got us wrong."

"Not wrong, just drawn down," Anderson says. He holsters his gun. "Okay," he says. "Any arguments?"

Charles Lump says, "I got nothing to do with this. Tom brought me along for the ride, I ain't got nothing against this town and I'm the first to say so. Anything this town wants to do is okay with me, so there."

"Oh shut up," Tom says weakly, "you're in this with me up to the hilt. I'm going to bleed to death here you don't stop talking and get me a doctor."

"You can get to a doctor out of town," Anderson says. He throws down his cigarette, carefully stomps it out with circular motion. No fires when the marshal is around. "Get up."

Charles turns, shrugs elaborately. On the floor Tom begins to dry heave, then vomits brightly. "Pack him over a horse and get him out," Anderson says, "there's a doctor over in Bluff City twenty miles west, you ought to be able to get him there before he passes out if you get going now."

There is no spirit left in either of the Lumps. Charles nods, bends, yanks Tom to his feet and lurches him past Anderson, out the swinging doors. Anderson watches them carefully, joins them then as they saddle up their horses, Tom clumsily in an attitude of prayer. Charles unhitches.

"There will be another time, Anderson," Tom says weakly. "This isn't the way it ends."

"Shut up," Charles says, helping him mount with a push. "Just get those

reins and let's get out of here."

"I had hoped for more from you than that," Anderson says carefully. "Maybe a little more fight next time, eh?"

"Maybe," Tom says. "Nothing ever ends. It replicates. It goes on and on."

"For Christ's sake shut up," Charles says. "Let's just get the hell going."

"Got nowhere to go," Tom says. He seems to be edging into delirium. "Anywhere we go, got to come back and face it. Unless we die out of it, Charlie. I think maybe I'll do that."

"Ain't so easy," Charles says. He glares at Anderson. "Ain't going to be so easy for you either; this is a tough country." Anderson stares back flatly, showing the outlaw his inner strength and Charles Lump drops his eyes, coughs, shakes his head, mounts his horse and taking the tether of the other, moves slowly away. He does not look back.

Hands on hips, gun dangling from his index finger, Anderson watches them all the way out of Tombstone. Their figures and the horses diminish to small, concentrated blobs of darkness that blend at last with the landscape to leave him there eternally and as always, alone. Soon enough it will be time to turn and face the silent crowd who have massed behind him he knows to pay him homage but for the moment Anderson does not need them, needs none of this at all, needs only the proud and terrible isolation which has been imposed on him in the role which he so humbly but gracefully has assumed:

The Avenger's front man.

Some years ago Anderson had begun to feel it all slip away, not only his career which had been slowly drained from him for many years but his very sense of self. All of his life, through the great times and the years of sorrow, he had been sustained as had most of those he knew by the belief that destiny was benign, that life was a sentence with a structure and that nothing so terrible could happen that would not yield salvation in the nick of time.

But the decade shook that faith. It shook faith but good, shock, implosion, the feeling of circumstance turning upon itself and there had been a period, it must have gone on for years, when Anderson had found himself questioning the sense of it all, when paralysis had settled like a cloak upon him for a long time he had been unable to perform all but the simplest actions. Sex, sleep, panels, conventions. Never an introspective man—but not nearly as stupid as a lot of them took him to be; that was his secret and his strength—he had found it hard to handle, like an undiagnosed, dreadful virus hanging on at the lip of reason.

It was the riots, the war, the circling anguish and the bewilderment, the terrible settling anger in this country that he loved and to which he had dedicated his life and purpose. Anderson could not get a handle on it. Surely it would have to be the times and not himself because this should have been the best period of his life. Sylvia and he had the understanding, he had the travel and the conventions, physically he might not be all that he had once been, a little shaky in crowds maybe, not as certain in bed as he had once taken for granted but the sense of decay which cut from the center had to do with politics.

They were making shit of everything decent, of everything for which he stood and it was too easy to say that they were communist dupes. That wasn't it at all. Anderson knew the truth by now; RED CHANNELS had sucked him in but he had outgrown that: there might be fifty practicing communists left.

Underground there were fifty thousand or a million of them hiding but they were not coming out and they were not practicing their deceit. No, it was the kids themselves and the war and the outside agitators from the Congoes running around to the ghettos on expense accounts inciting to riot. God damn it; he was a man of reasonable sensitivity but there was such a thing as going too far.

He went to the back lot to discuss it with the Lump brothers one morning. The Lumps hadn't been heard from in years and years: they had gone into the can along with Republic Studios but they were still there for pain and conversation, bored and lonely like most of the old characters, still hanging around the commissary and waiting for the big turnaround. Everyone was waiting for the big turnaround about then, Anderson too, but no one had looked up the Lumps for a long time and they were almost pathetic in their eagerness to talk. "Jesus Christ, Anderson," Tom said, extending his damaged wrist, the one that had been shot and had never properly healed, "It's good to see you. We never thought we'd see you again." Charles grabbed Anderson's free arm and rubbed it passionately. "Maybe you got some work?" he said.

"Yeah, Tom said, "work, we're ready. Got out equipment and everything. Ready to go."

"No work," Anderson said. He shrugged. Just some questions."

"Hell," Tom said. "We were hoping for work. Soon as we seen you, we said this is it. We're going into that town again. You can even shoot up the other hand you want."

"Afraid not," Anderson said. "No town, no shooting." He squatted on his haunches in the old easy posture, the Lumps leaned over him, their faces beckoning and doglike. "Where did it go wrong?" Anderson said, "we were at the height of our power, we controlled everything. Then we started to pull out piece and we lost our power, the President got shot, the kids went crazy on us and the whole thing started to come apart."

"Forget the President," Charles Lump said, "that was a good one, it was a move in the right direction."

"Maybe," Anderson said. He thought about it. Images of the city in the sun, the fallen roses. "Maybe it was but it wasn't civilized."

"Country ain't civilized unless things like that do happen," Charles Lump said. He spat. "You think it's easy taking lead on the back lots for thirty years? Got to be some point or purpose."

"But it's no answer."

"Ain't no answer," Tom said. "Bunch of tethered horses and old film that ain't been shown for years. Don't even show it in television."

"We were kind of hoping you might have an answer," Tom said painfully, flexing his wrist. "Least we could ask, you being the marshal who shot us up and threw us out of town and all that. If you don't have an answer, Anderson, who in hell does?"

"It's out there," Anderson said. "I know it is." A palpable sense of mystery seems to invade him; maybe it was for this that he went to see the Lumps. "I guess I'll go look for it."

"Well, you carry the news back when you get it," Charles said. "We'll be waiting. Maybe there'll be a little action in it for us, too."

Anderson stood. He waited politely for the Lumps to straighten but they remain crouched. Arthritis has caught their joints, sucked their motion. "Well," he said awkwardly, "guess I'll be seeing you."

"Sure thing," Charles Lump said. He extended a hand. Anderson touched it, then patted old Tom on his shoulder.

"Sure was good times back then," Tom said.

Anderson nodded. He strode from the back lot but when he is back in his rental car heading toward Pasadena he came to understand that he had no real destination. Open-mouthed he drove the freeway for hours. Fortunately circumstance took him one more time.

At the cabinet the Soviets' latest ultimatum is discussed. Some suggest withdrawal while others counsel invasion or at least a fierce reply. Anderson shrugs, waves his hands. "Whatever you say, whatever you think." It is all too much for him, poised as he is on the edge of a new idea.

Forbes, the white house doctor gives him an unscheduled and unexplained physical. Sylvia's instigation? Rumors he is losing his grip? News reports that he seems to be tottering and losing the thread of his speeches? Anderson submits wearily. Bowels, digestion fine he tells Forbes, mind focussed and clear. In the sack? Forbes says shrewdly, his eyes glittering with interest. "No difference," Anderson says. It is an answer to cover everything. Forbes squeezes the sphygmomanometer bulb furiously until the constriction forces metal and then releases: in the expiring hiss Anderson hears the sound of a crowd. State has fumbled. He will get a chance with the ball again.

At three in the morning he gets the call from Bitters, acting for the Joint Chiefs, he says. Tracers in Alaska have found activity, radar had subsequently picked up a convoy of jets of undetermined origin streaking over the Pacific toward the Golden Gate Bridge.

"It doesn't look good," Bitters says.

"What the hell does that mean?" Anderson says. He has slept badly, moving from one convolute dream to the next, sound stages of memory inhabited by goblins and archetypes and for a moment he thinks that this is yet another dream but the speaker phone glints, Bitter's whining, melodramatic voice is not the voice is not the voice of recollection. "Are they aggressive forces or not?"

"Well we don't know. They're moving aggressively."

"Is it possible the radar is wrong?" These things have happened Anderson knows.

"No. We've ordered a retaliatory strike force into the air as a matter of fact."

"You did all this without clearing?"

"It's in the statutes," Bitters says nervously. He has been with Anderson for a long time. Since the Senate campaign as a matter of fact. Anderson has never been able to figure out exactly how Bitters has insinuated himself so deeply into his political life and the administration but it was never worth the trouble of confrontation. Get along, go along. He had been a good appointments secretary anyway.

"Then why are you clearing it with me now? Why don't you just go ahead and deliver the payload? Isn't that what you want?"

Bitters says nothing. That is the key to his power; he responds only to those questions which he can answer, ignores the rest. Anderson has come to admire

the quality; he has learned a bit of it himself. "Well," he says, "what am I supposed to do? Wake the Premier and tell him what's going on here? Is it an international crisis or not?"

"I'm just advising you of the situation," Bitters says.

Anderson reaches out and cuts the connection. For an instant he is insanely attracted by the idea of going back to sleep. The bombers will meet on their suicide collision or they will not; the retaliatory strikes will begin or they will not...but in a few hours it will all be over anyway and either way it goes there will be no penalty for him. None whatsoever.

The idea lunges at him like a lover, casts tentacles heavy with desire over him; it is with an effort that Anderson drags himself from the iron compulsion and stumbles from the bed. He hits switch after switch, floods the room with light. The entire mechanism of this government is his to command, the awesome technology that can spirit his voice to the Premier or a hundred thousand missiles to deadly target is waiting to serve but at this moment, in this room it is to Anderson as if none of it exists, as if all of it, the situation, the Presidency itself is hallucinatory and that if he were to fully concentrate he would be fourteen years old and back in his Omaha bedroom, peeping at the more benign shapes of the night. Shakily he pours himself a drink from the bottle by his bedside, thinking of the sounds of the flatlands as they poured through his bedroom. There were no planes in the sky then, no missiles, no bombers, no retaliatory strike forces or warheads or Joint Chiefs. No Bitters. There were only he and hope in the darkness but that was a long time ago to be sure and of no moment. What is happening now is that he is in the grip of some kind of international crisis and he cannot find a position.

What would a President do? Anderson thinks about it. There was that Henry Fonda film which dealt with something similar but he had never seen it, just heard about it. Actually he was pretty weak on movies in which he had not acted, he was too busy making films in that time to watch them and there are serious gaps in his background, important matters hence which he will never come to understand. The phone lights and he thinks about ignoring it, then sighs and activates. "All right," Bitters says, "this has been discussed and the decision is that there's no alternative but a full retaliatory strike."

"What if it's a mistake?"

"Everyone knows the rules of this. There's no mistake anyway; we've checked it visually. Those jets are a thousand miles outside circumference in a target zone."

Circumference. Target zone. Anderson has always admired the cool language of the military; they seem to have a handle on things. "So you want the bombers ordered up."

"That's already done."

"What if I countermand?"

"That would be unwise."

"For God's sake," Anderson says, "you're talking about the end of the world, don't you know that?"

"You're talking about the end of San Francisco regardless."

"So does attacking them bring it back?"

"Does not attacking them save the rest of the country? This is just the first step. They're testing our will."

"What if it's just a bluff?"

"They're over the perimeter. You don't understand that this is very serious business."

"The fate of the world is my concern."

"Unless you countermand, then," Bitters says and cuts the connection. Anderson looks at the speaker in amazement. The dull sound of transmission warns him that he must cut his own end. What the hell do I do now? he thinks. He cuts the connection. What have I gotten myself into here? I didn't want any of this. I was just doing a favor for some friends. What the hell kind of ambitions did I have anyway? I wanted to save the world, not to end it. This is craziness. I'm an old man, I need my rest. I should be asleep now.

"Take them out," Tom Lump says wisely, clutching his withered hands. Tom and he have become more intimate in recent days; unlike his brother he feels free to come into the Presidential bedroom and engage in reminiscence, now offer advice. "What the hell else can you do? They've strayed."

"This could be the end of the world, Tom."

"Oh come on," Tom says calmly. "Shoot. The world isn't going to end. All that we've heard since 1946 is that if we did this, if we did that the world would end and nothing much has happened except that every time we *didn't* take that stand they'd nibble another piece off. If we'd just gone ahead and acted like men from the start they wouldn't be putting bombers over us now but that doesn't mean we have to back off."

Tom spits, rubs his heel over the spot. "Awful sorry to do that in your bedroom," he says. "The white house and all. I mean this is the President I'm talking to, I mean to show a little respect."

"It isn't that simple you know," Anderson says, "I used to think it was but its different once you get into this office; you see all kinds of problems—"

"Shoot again," Tom says wisely, "we've heard that kind of crap from anyone who ever came into the government; they campaign that they're going to clean things up, change them, stop putting up with what got us here and the next thing you know they're talking about the powers and problems of office and the humility of leadership and the complexity of the times and the *next* thing you hear it's the same crap all over again until someone else shoots them or blows them out." Tom clutches his emaciated wrist. "Long time ago when something had to be done you just went ahead and *did* it," he reminds Anderson. "Wasn't kind and hurt like hell but I'm still walking around and it sure cleaned up the problem, didn't it? You were right to do it and I'm the first one to say it. You had no choice. It was a lucky thing you spared my life but you could have cut me down and my brother too in that street and it would have served us right."

"That was the movies," Anderson said. "That wasn't really happening, that was film. Wasn't it? You can't take that kind of stuff all that seriously, Tom."

"Really?" Tom says, "seemed real enough to me. Seems real enough right now. Can't pick up a coffee cup in this hand, hurts all night and real bad when I get up in the morning. I reckon it was real."

"It wasn't," Anderson says. But maybe it was, he thought. It was certainly as real as this. He had lines which made more sense than anything going on here and the heat under the camera had been terrific. The pain was real, later in the daily rushes it carried. "I've got to make a decision here," he says. "I've got to

face up to it."

"Seems to me the decision is made. All you got to do now is let events take their course."

"I'm the President. I'm supposed to control events."

"That's just stuff you heard on television," Tom says. "That's just stuff you seen in the movies."

"What does that mean?"

"You start to talk about what's real, what's not real," Tom says, "you ought to think about that Bitters."

"What?"

"He don't seem so real to me," Tom says, "seems to me that he's carrying on like something out of the movies. Where the hell did he come from, huh?"

Anderson stares at him.

"Just think about that," Tom Lump says, "just think about that."

He winks and vanishes.

Anderson can't think about it. Not now. If Bitters isn't real what is he then, a figment of his imagination that he has dragged from the Nebraska Senate campaign clear on, a dozen years later, to the white house and nuclear crisis? What is he a hallucination, someone he has invented to blame for the acts which he cannot accept himself? No, he will not even think about it; what he has to decide now if this is all some kind of psychological test. Maybe that is the answer.

Forbes and Sylvia and Bitters are in on it; probably the Lump brothers too. They are testing his will and resolve. Anderson knows all about the rumors from the press digests Bitters puts in front of him: that he has gone senile, retreated behind a wall in the white house, lost his grip, allowed matters to be taken out of his hand. The cut down in public appearances suggests that he might be a babbling fool. There are those who say that he has become a drooling oldster; that a stroke or irreversible kidney damage has done him in.

Now, it is possible that he has been showing symptoms and that they have banded together to test him. That is a possibility: under the 22nd Amendment the determination of a President's capacity to govern can be made outside of him and they have grouped to see if he really has lost his marbles. That would explain everything: the way that Sylvia is making insatiable sexual demands and the Lump brothers checking into the Presidential quarters and now this damned nuclear strike which was made up to see if he could control himself in a crisis. He had no evidence after all that any of this was happening, just a couple of calls from Bitters (who according to Tom might be imaginary in which case none of this was really going on except inside his own head but he could not tangle with the meaning of that; better to say that Bitters was real. Sure he was real; no one could invent someone like that hard, ungiving man.)

They were trying to find how he would react. Forbes and a team of shrinks were probably monitoring everything to get a sense of the situation. And in that case, Anderson thinks sullenly, the hell with all of them. He kicks off his shoes, sits on the bed. It would serve them right if he failed their goddamned test. It would serve them exactly right if he were to collapse under all of these pressures deliberately heaped on him: the sex, the crisis, the suspicions and the complaint and they had to invoke the 22nd and put the vice president whoever the hell that was in. Maybe they would get a good dose of the situation and see

exactly what he'd been dealing with all of this time. They'd have to have someone else play President for them and let's see if he would do any better, Anderson thinks bitterly. He stares at the telephone for a long time, pondering his next move.

His next move is going to be a big one and he wants to make sure that it will be exactly right for the situation. No margin for error now.

Could he have invented Bitters and dragged him through a dozen years? Why, that would make him crazy.

It surely would.

After the holocaust, Anderson thinks, it will be wonderful. No more problems, questions, conflicts. Simple resolution. Plans have been made in a top-secret fashion for decades to spirit the leaders of government and industry underground at the first indication of nuclear strike and so he will be sped to an enormous shelter just south of Roanoke, Virginia where luxurious quarters have been hollowed out miles under the surface for a luxurious existence while waiting for the fallout to clear. Several hundred of them will be in this most ornate and homelike of all the shelters; a small city underground with the appurtenances of modern living and he will still very much be the President. Anderson knows how it will be there. They will leave him alone and he will have miles of glistening underground corridor to explore should he ever become bored. Millions of dollars have been spent over the years on this shelter; it is packed with devices to amuse. His old films are there, a screening room, light and speed and sound.

It may be possible, he thinks, to come to terms with the key questions of his life underground. In these dozens years he has not had much time for contemplation, the kind of pondering in which a man must engage as he nears the end of his days. It had been his hope before politics intervened to use time to read and think but neither the Senate nor the white house were places where a man could come to terms with philosophy. Among the questions that he would consider in the deeps, Anderson supposed, were: the true weight of his marriage, the sense of his career, the influence of having been a fantasy figure upon his own inner life (could fantasy figures have fantasies themselves?) and the question as to whether being a wish fulfillment figure had made him capable of wishes. A lot had to do with the acting of course: you took direction, first from your agent, then the scriptwriter and producer, then the director himself; you were always following someone's conception of what you should be and why and you tend to be measured as an actor in how well you came up to others' expectations. But that could be dangerous because all of his life he had been working for the others.

Could that be the reason for Bitters? So that even here, at the pinnacle, he would have someone to work for?

Well, godamn it, maybe it was time that he did something for himself, looked for his own goals and desires. Struck out. But that left another hard question: if you played it their way for almost three quarters of your life. doing what they wanted you to do to their satisfaction, could it be said at the end of this that you had anything inside independent of them? Did he *have* any goals and desires? Or was it just a matter of being a people pleaser, a box office winner? He would give this some thought too while he prowled the corridors and networks of the

gleaming underground city. He would not let possibilities of the slightest substance whisk by.

Anderson sees himself on the rim of the underground city. He has left quarters early, before the full fluorescence that in the controlled, timeless environment would be "day"; in the controlled seventy-six degree temperature pouring from the cannisters he walks in golfer's clothing past the tightly closed cubicles of his sleeping brethren, past the darkened cafeteria and recreation quarters, the closed library, past the exercise courts and into the deeper network. The tunnels fan here like flowers, open up like tumors, the lighting spurts uncontrolled reds and purple. Determinedly, Anderson walks through this, wallowing in the silence, fixated on his goal which is the great, grey space into which the tunnels feed and where the network ends. The space is framed by a high wall which dwindles into the fading light; in the wall are carved the letters and numerals which cryptographically instruct the engineers on how to maintain. Anderson has access to the codes but will never study them. Senseless. Technology has always mystified although he has enjoyed its benefits no less than any other American. It made him a fortune, put him in power.

Now, on the stone floor into which the tunnels empty, Anderson stands, faces the wall and in the grey light deduces the sense of this greatest adventure of his life. Not two weeks ago he was the President in the country at the height of power; now he may be President but he lives with two hundred others underground and for all he knows the rest of his constituency is dead. Communications with the outside do not exist. Communication links with other shelters were planned but do not work. For all Anderson knows he may be with the last on earth but he does not want to deal with this complexity. The reality, the sheer weight of his present environment involves and amazes; for now they are all he needs to know of circumstance. He stands looking at the wall.

"Position," Bitters says. He has followed him all the way out here. "You know what to do."

Anderson knows what to do. He has always known; that is his strength and curse. "Only one more chance," Bitters says.


"And Tom?"

"Right," Bitters says. "For Tom."

For Tom, then. He always knew that it would be this way, didn't he? It would come to this. Anderson crouches. Position.

"Now," Bitters says. His face is obdurate, magnificent in the stricken light. "Now."

Now. Fourth and one on the ten yard line, thirty-six seconds left on the stadium clock, no time-outs, game hanging in the balance. Anderson perches over the center, his eyes filled with alertness, his chest heaving with the excitement of it all, the lacerating cold turning warm inside, each exhalation truly a burst of fire.





CHARLES L. GRANT

The Wind of Lost Migration

It was just before sunset that the sky over the Starburst was finally swept clear. The shadows on the mountains that enclosed the quarter-moon valley were closing rapidly on the horseshoe bay below me, and I had to squint to see the ocean beyond. I was sitting on my front stoop searching for portents on the evening wind, portents that would assure me I could indeed get away with murder.

It was...tempting. The end of this October had unexpectedly dovetailed a plan I'd been nursing for a year without any thought that it might really come to pass. And now that the opportunity was here, I was suddenly apprehensive I could not pull it off.

Of course, were I as dedicated as I'd convinced myself I was, I would have long ago shot that sanctimonious bastard. Right in the middle of his impassioned prose.

That I was equivocating, however, made me pause.

I was about to leave the stoop, then, and go inside when a quick movement stayed me. A bird the size of my hand landed on the walk not three feet from where I sat, talons clicking, pale beak opening without a sound. Its awkwardly large wings, once settled, fattened it and hid the dashes of red that deepened its black coat.

It blinked, and I winked back. "Listen," I said softly, "you and your pals better not let me down. Cal Wolder's come a long way to see you perform, and you'd damn well better make it good."

It cocked its head at just the right moment, I laughed, and it immediately vanished into the night, its abrupt cry grating over every note of music I'd ever heard. Soon, a rustling of feathers passed over the house, but when I looked up

there was nothing but the trace of a cry which made me, not for the first time, want to know what madman had named them sweetbirds.

A string of amber and red lights marked the slow passage of a fishing boat from the sea to the bay at the base of the valley's slope. And it was now, before the full moon rising, that I loved Starburst most—for all its homes no two alike, for the people who lived here, and the people who came here to relax, recoup, in a place where tolerance was usually the order.

Somewhere along the street (the uppermost on the slope, just before the mountains' forest began) a woman laughed, a man scolded, and I shifted uneasily, hoping Wolder wasn't out for an inspirational stroll with one of the local women. I listened for the telephone, too, hoping it would signal Ray Forrester's arrival at the hotel. But I was alone still, there on my stoop, thinking of our conversation when I'd gone to New York to ask Wolder down.

Ray, however, thought I was crazy. "You know, Christopher, I can see now why you hate this man so much."

"No kidding," I said. "So can I."

"I wonder."

"All right," I said, "so tell me your end. I'm always willing to be educated."

Ray had shifted his three hundred pounds in the great leather chair, scorching holes in my indifferent facade with an orange-eyed cigar. "Simple. He controls people and you do not. He reaches more with those books and that so-called research outfit than you ever will with that one little volume you still haven't written."

But I'm the ornithologist, damnit," I said, barely holding my temper. "I know what I'm talking about; he only thinks he does. Ray, the man's dangerous, and I doubt he realizes it. He has made a fortune popularizing that Technology Marries Man and Nature crap. He oversimplifies for the masses who feel guilty. He soothes that guilt. People actually believe he's a scientist, and he won't deny it!"

"I know, I know, but listen—"

"To what? When he and his troops hit that Congressional hearing on wildlife preserves, he had those idiots actually believing there are dozens of avian species we can let go down the tubes and not feel a thing."

Ray had sighed loudly. "I know that already, Christopher."

"But damnit, his version of technology isn't going to keep all those pests—and I don't mean just insects—in check. He's going to kill us all off and he doesn't even know it."

"Chris, you're overdramatizing, as usual. It's not that bad."

"It isn't?"

When all the world says yes, and you say...

Equivocating again. A bad habit of would-be heroes.

THAT LAUGHTER was cut off by the slam of a door, but I could not relax. I was getting used to the tension creating ripples from the sweetbirds' nests, but the additional pressure of Cal Wolder's presence was just enough to keep my hands trembling, my eyes barely focused. Doubts bubbled, burst and reformed, and when a flock rose in a fragmented cloud over the houses opposite, and lower than, mine, whirled and settled, I stood, stretched, and went inside, grateful for the silence...and the bar I'd given myself for my thirty-sixth birthday.

I poured a hefty drink and hoped Wolder was happy with whomever he'd

lured into the rented house next to mine. He had arrived the afternoon before, and I'd invited him to dinner—a quiet meal and reasonably friendly. We'd parted without comment, though at one point I'd stood at the open front door and looked down over the town. "They're getting restless," I'd said, nodding toward the birds. "A hundred or more centuries prodding their stupid little fantails to overcome a lousy couple of generations of miserable existence."

"What?" Wolder had moved to stand beside me.

"I said, they're getting restless again."

"Oh." Nothing more.

He was dark as I am fair, tall to short, clear-eyed to glasses that kept sliding down my nose. He'd come because I'd taken courage in hand and virtually promised him a miracle of Nature, something he'd definitely use in his next book, or interview, or column. He didn't have to come, but he took the dare anyway; mainly, I think, because men like him specialize in stepping on ants.

But he was still killing my world, and if I had to do the same to him to make my point...

I finished a bottle, slid under the covers and listened to the birds outside the window. It was one thing to see an egg softened because of insecticide, one thing to watch the eagles' demise, but the sweetbirds were something not seen anywhere but here, a close and raucous cousin to the grackle, which itself was now gone. And if Wolder couldn't learn now, my equivocations would be moot.

EARLY THE following morning the telephone rang and Ernie Wells, the hotel's proprietor, told me there was a man storming through the lobby demanding my immediate and instant appearance. I groaned, but five minutes later was driving quickly down the slope. A flurry of sweetbirds darted across the road, and after I'd parked in front of the hotel I looked up to see several groups of them making feints at the cap of thick mist that never left the mountains. The people on the street huddled as though it were raining.

Wells told me Forrester was out on the beach, and I hurried across the street and up an alley, using the thin ice of the morning air to clear my head before stepping onto the pale grey beach. The sun glinted off the still water, and it took me a moment to locate Ray's ponderous bulk at the bay's edge.

"You," I said, coming up behind him, "are a goddamned pest."

He only shrugged, waited until I'd moved beside him before saying, "I am not a pest, Sinclair. I am merely pursuing what I believe will be a grandiose project destined to become—"

"Shit."

"Never," he said, refusing to smile. "I only want to help you be as famous as you deserve. Through my magnificently produced film, you and I will alert the world to its mortal danger. Maybe pick us up a couple of awards to gild the samaritan lily."

"Ray, what can I say to a carrot like that."

I took his arm and we walked, as we had many times before on other beaches, other streets, arguing and getting nowhere, completely without rancor. "Listen," I said finally, "I appreciate your concern, no matter how mercenary it might be, but I don't see how the film will make a difference. You know I can't write a screenplay, I wouldn't know one if I fell over it, and horror films with birds have been done a million times already. Give or take."

"It's not a horror movie, it's a documentary." He stopped, sniffed the air. "I

hear Cal Wolder is in town." I said nothing. "You have him in a place by yours, yes?"

"Ray, I don't know what you're thinking, but—"

His notions, Christopher, are popular not only because they absolve the public of a certain amount of responsibility, but they also use little of the taxpayer's money. You are expensive in more ways than one. However, I've always felt keenly about championing the underdog." He grinned, and chins and jowls danced to its tune.

"All right," I said, fearing my plot was as naked as my face, "suppose you did make this film—what would happen then?"

A cry, then, more like a spectre of Poe's black messenger, and we saw a solitary bird over the water. It descended, skimmed toward us and rose to be bleached out of sight by the autumn sun.

"That's got to be the ugliest sound in creation," Ray muttered.

You never heard a grackle, I suppose," I said.

"What's that?"

"Was," I corrected. "A bird. That sweetbird's a relative."

"Whatever," he said, and swerved us to the left, toward the buildings that backed the sand, into an alley and out onto the main street. "And in case you're wondering," he said, glaring at the traffic, "I'm here to witness that sweetbird storm you told me about. I want to see how it'd look on the screen. Why is Wolder here?"

"I asked him down to make a point," I answered blithely as my nerves would allow.

After a sidelong glance he turned away, and we said no more about this film of his, knowing that one book from Wolder would more than overshadow anything Ray or I could do; after all, all the films since the middle of the century hadn't prevented the condor from turning into an aluminum monument atop the California statehouse, or the oriole from retreating to a dictionary definition.

A break in traffic permitted us to cross the street, and once there we moved silently past the hotel and into the large park that spread grandly behind it. Shadows moved in time to the wind and stirred the scent of fallen leaves. It was quiet. And for a moment, just a moment, I couldn't help thinking Wolder might actually listen to reason instead of fear.

"Where are those damned pests of yours?" Ray shouted from behind a weeping elm.

"The sweetbirds?"

"Whatever."

"This time of year they prefer the slopes," a voice said over my shoulder. I spun around as if ice had been dropped down my neck, saw Cal Wolder standing casually at the edge of the tarmac path, hands in pockets, pipe and grin in mouth. I smiled tightly, but introductions were unnecessary since the two already knew each other. Ray, with a pointed glare, only nodded once and lumbered away. Wolder whistled silently.

"He doesn't have many friends," I said finally.

"Yes, I can see that. Is he going to make one of those films with you, to scare us all into hatching little chicks under our beds?"

I closed my eyes briefly. "A little early to be nasty, Cal."

"But I have to be, Chris. I've an image to protect."

Reluctantly I admitted its truth, and that his sniping abrasiveness had an indefinable quality that incomprehensibly—to me, anyway—endeared him to commoner and Congressman alike whenever he was pitted against the scientific community. And the worst part about all this was...we'd once been friends before our ideals crossed purposes.

"Did he come for the storm, too?"

I nodded, wishing suddenly I had a gun so I could get it over with, go home, and get drunk.

"Well, when does it happen?"

I listened to the calls, sporadic but gathering, and smiled without mirth. "Any minute." I shuddered without wanting to. "Any minute, Chris."

We danced a bit, muttering, mumbling, before Ray announced he was hungry. Telling myself I was ten kinds of a fool, I took them both to the sixth floor of the hotel where a cocktail lounge with walls of green marble overlooked the stores and the bay beyond. Clouds had begun weaving in from the ocean, white into black, a blanket the sun was pulling up after it, over it, past it to merge with the mist on the slope. Shadows faded in the darkening streets, and the lights blinking in gentle neon served only to scatter them more, making us all feel as if we were being followed.

"Ridiculous," Forrester said after our drinks had arrived. "I've come a long way for this show, and you're all behaving as if I'd been invited to a funeral."

"It's the tension," I said, trying not to choke. "The birds are preparing themselves, and it's infecting everyone. The town's been on edge for over a week."

"Does anyone stay out when this happens?" Ray asked.

"Not many. I have, a couple of times," and I looked to Wolder for his patented comment, but he was strangely quiet, his eyes unable to stray very long from the view of the bay, and the tiny birds wheeling above the stores.

The drinks vanished into a silence.

"All right!" Forrester said suddenly. "Christopher, what's so important about this storm of yours? Then take me to the best place to observe it. After that, maybe we can talk about making some filthy creds the banks will fawn over."

"Cal's the one who's written for films," I said, abruptly uneasy. "Talk to him."

"I'm waiting," Forrester warned, poking at the folds under his chin.

I tried to smile away the invisible spotlight that seemed to be blinding me, but Wolder was shaking off whatever bothered him in order to reassemble his famous smug expression, the one I was going to shove in the face of the storm...if only I could get damned Ray out of the way.

"Well," I said, my voice harsh, almost shrill, "the sweetbird has been a purely local creature for decades, driven here not by choice because elsewhere it couldn't breed, breathe, or sing."

"Sing? Good God!"

It was Wolder, and for some reason I was starting to feel giddy. "Sing, Cal. See, a bird, any bird, actually has a modified language—of sorts, mind you, only of sorts—but a distinct and identifiable method of communication nonetheless. Like a perfect symphony with all the shades of all the instruments, a bird's call is modified for whatever purposes are necessary—mating, territory, fun...whatever. Now most of this is most likely on the instinctive level, but they definitely have a need for communication, and they have a type of language to serve it."

"Interesting," Wolder said, and I was disconcerted to think he might actually

mean it. I would have smiled, but I'd taken a second look outside and saw the birds increasing, flying low now over the hotel toward their nests.

"Let me guess," Wolder said, nearly too quietly to hear. "What you're saying is, that those birds most affected by our technological complexes—"

"Doesn't leave too many out," Ray muttered.

"are dying out primarily because of lack of proper food affects fertility and egg structure. Their so-called voices, however, are also suffering, somewhat analagous to the sharp increase in hoarseness and other throat ailments during a prolonged smog alert."

"Absolutely," I said, hating him for my admiration. "And the most vivid example I can think of belongs to the sweetbird. They can't be heard for as great a distance now, their very songs, their language, is changing...and their responses haven't been able to accommodate those changes rapidly enough."

"Interesting," Wolder said again.

Suddenly, a bird attracted by the lounge's lights hovered like some grotesque moth beyond the glass wall and a woman screamed. There were echoing commotions in other parts of the room and I stood, less nervous than I thought I'd be. "It's coming," I said. I looked to Cal, eyebrows raised, and he was pale, trying to finish what was left of his drink. I almost wished he would stay behind, but as I hurried toward the elevator both men followed, saying nothing until we reached the street and I led the way to my car.

Most of the road heading up the slope to my place was deserted. I did see one man standing in his yard with a camera to hand, two more draped around his neck, and a fourth fastened to a wobbly tripod. At another, larger home a father and son stood in the sidewalk, the father pointing into the motionless tree in the center of his property. No cars passed, and once I'd reached the spot where the road began its gentle curve back down to the bay, there were no more people.

I parked in the driveway and brought them around to the back where they could see the forest beginning not fifty yards from the rear of my yard, and the lower fringes of the mist that swirled through the branches. From a small shed tucked into the yard's back corner I passed out heavy gloves, jackets, and protective masks modeled on those a beekeeper would use.

"Are you always this prepared?" Wolder asked.

I handed him a pair of boots large enough to slip over his shoes. "Every year someone goes into the mist. Usually, they're unprotected."

"You mean they don't come down again?"

I didn't answer. I was trying to figure out how to get him up there without Ray thinking, afterward, that I'd pushed him into it.

"It's hot in here," Ray said, adjusting his headgear and tapping on the plastic faceplate.

"Then shut up," I told him.

"How far do we have to go?" Wolder asked nervously.

"We don't."

Ray turned, a hand raised in an impatient fist.

"We don't have to go up there," I repeated sharply. "They'll come to us."

And before I could explain further, the leaves of the trees seemed to separate from their branches and lift into the roiling air.

And this time there was thunder.

And a cascade of wind that shredded the lower mist.

There were hundreds, there might have been thousands, but I doubt any of us were trying to count as the first wave approached and we dropped to the ground, huddling.

Pellets and stones, the sweetbirds lifted in mass migration, streaming from the valley with calliope shrieks, twigs and dead bark striking the streets like night-blackened hail. House high they darted, never wheeling, whirling, changing direction; upward always, into the mist that covered the mountains. Screeching, calling, understanding nothing, not even themselves. Endless, it seemed, until I grabbed Wolder and Forrester by their shoulders and pointed, showing them the first faint escape from the hills cradling the bay, sweeping over the water until they rejoined the others, and it was a single beak-to-tail writhing snake of wings in thunder and songs in agony.

Ray leaned closer. "I want to go up in there before it's all over!" and he pointed behind him.

I shook my head violently, tilting so Cal could hear me well. "No! It's too dangerous Ray. You don't know what they do up there. They can't see well. Believe me, we—"

"So we'll stay on the ground like the goddamned infantry," he laughed, and yanked his arm out of my grip and crawled away. Wolder, for whom the dare had been meant, hesitated before jabbing me lightly on the chest and following.

The birds were lower now, and while I cursed feebly one fell onto my car, fluttering a wing broken either in exertion or collision. My head began to ache with her screams and the wind of their wings, and I slapped my hands over my ears to dull the noise. And in that moment's peace there was a thought: it had come—the perfect murder! Cal vanishes into the fog, the bird's undirected frenzy kill him, and I manage to lose what I'd thought was my worst enemy. So why the hell was I fighting all that nausea, and why was I beating at the ground until my damned hands stung?

I couldn't think of anything, then. I just ran into the forest, where the ground was slightly ridged and less slippery than I'd remembered. Using boles and thicker branches of shrubs, I propelled myself into the mist, thankful it was easier to see through than into. Above me the birds had blended into a blood-spotted river, and more than once I had to swallow convulsively when a body thudded against my back or onto my headgear. Further, and the river broke up as the birds lost direction, panicked, and began veering toward the arms of the hills.

Migration, I had told them; but what I hadn't been able to explain was the generations-newer, fear-overlay of the outside world. A clash of instincts: they wanted to leave Starburst, yet something told them there was death out there. Ten, twenty, a hundred years from now that migration pattern would fade and they would stay and there would be no storms. Today, however, it was all in equilibrium—and it was driving them mad.

I heard a shout and squinted through the twilight born of bird and mist, and saw Wolder struggling with Ray, trying to drag him back toward the house. For a moment I was stopped, tempted to leave both of them, knowing how it was when the storm was over...before the birds turned their frustrations into senseless lightning strikes at whatever moved beneath them.

Wolder looked up and saw me, raised a hand to beckon and had to use it to

fend off blind jabbings of a trio of beaks.

And the winds, the shrieking, the banshee terror that had lost its tune.

I tripped over something, I didn't see what, and gasped at the lances jarring through my arms when I caught myself. Something landed on my back, struggled and left, returned to find a space between my jacket and trousers...and the fires began until I rolled onto my side and felt a soft struggling give. Then I was on my feet again and grabbing at Ray's other arm, guiding rather than lifting him to stand on one foot. The fog lifted, dropped, and continued to thread itself with black; and I could not tell how much time had passed before we staggered into my living room and eased the big man onto the couch.

I called the police and requested an ambulance while Wolder took off Ray's boot and tossed aside with a grimace the crushed body of a bird.

"Lacerations, mainly," he said when I asked.

"That's all right," I said, not looking. "Infection can set in fast anyway. He has to go to the hospital, just to be sure."

"You two are acting like I'm already dead," Ray complained, his eyes tightly shut. "But it was a magnificent performance, Chris."

"Don't tell me you're coming back next year to film it."

"You're kidding! Not in a million years."

There was no explanation needed; it would have been like filming a funeral and calling it Art.

A silence. A shuffling. Ray moaning, and the birds quieting.

"Hey," Wolder said, "there must be something to drink in this house. Hustle up a couple, will you, Chris? Maybe later on we can talk about..."

He fell silent, but not before we mirrored embarrassed smiles. Another book, maybe; perhaps only an article. But if Cal was as frightened as he looked...I whispered a not very sincere warning to myself about leopards and spots, and went behind the bar.

And as I poured without measuring I glanced out the window and saw the sweetbirds returning. Slowly. Only a few.

The rest would be drifting into the mist to feed on the dead...and whatever else still moved beneath the misted branches. ●

Charles L. Grant

Cold data runs like this: 70 short stories, 25 novels under a few different names, 11 anthologies, two collections; born, raised, and living in New Jersey (and yes, there really are parts of New Jersey where one can live outside the twin umbrellas of New York and Philadelphia, thus giving us unpolluted air and room to walk around); recently married to novelist Kathryn Ptacek, who uses even more pseudonyms than I do, probably because everyone keeps spelling her last name incorrectly. Warm data includes the fact that "The Wind of Lost Migration" has been rewritten at least a dozen times because I kept getting it wrong. Once the plot sequence

was worked out, there was still something missing at the core, something you can't put your finger on ("Yeah, here on page 12" or "Maybe he ought to have purple eyes, for affect"), but you know damned well it's missing. Finding that elusive critter took at least eight of those drafts.

The story is also another installment of a series I've been doing for several years now (including, among others, "A Glow of Candles, A Unicorn's Eye", and "A Voice Not Heard"); the series deals with artists and artistry. It's bad enough, these days, that children with talents in all fields of art are not encouraged enough because these talents aren't "productive" enough—

as if culture depends on assembly-line expertise, sanitation engineer fight songs, and Norman Rockwell. I fear the future is going to be much worse than we think it

will be. We'll survive, but like Henry James' American, we're going to be boring as hell because we've killed off the intangibles in favor of the Waltons.



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DAVID R. BUNCH

December for Stronghold 9



The sky closed up high that early-morning day, and all seemed usual-fine over steely Moderan. Then there came a cover-break as vapor far aloft grew most pointy and great-dangerous claws that dipped and seethed, swished and swirled, as all subheaven appeared to fight. He (still in his slinger bed) wondered and felt almost young for a little while, seeing this sky excitement enliven his usually-dull weather wall. He had, in all his remembered times, even in Olderan, gone getter in the dark and swirly days, when King Death and Queen Threat seemed about to extend their sways to include cloud cover and all the world under. Yes! there moved strange danger-sign, doom portent and emblems of disaster, in the air that regulated early-morning day, but only for a little while. Then all rolled smooth to the slate gray vapor shield of old December, and he knew that another full day of Knob Time was ironed in. Central had thumbled right again, the correct knobs had sunken home and things were now switch-functional and normal-toggles-it in the sky over steely Moderan.

And things were switch-functional and normal-toggles with him too. To all outside appearances. But old (and older did they turn). Some catch in the smooth workings, a malfunction of the Joy-trims, was in the heart and mind now, clawing the good times down, negating all his tall ambitions, selling short his many strong longings for power—everything now sunken to ciphers. Floating airborne zeros and great blank rectangles of levitated Nothing rolled, bumped and collided in his mind; and he moved on a vast windless plain where all the flat in the world was end-to-end and side-to-side. A strong and gummy stillness boxed his ears and smacked his face to almost smotheration while he tried to coax his mind and his combative spirit closed him down, clamped upon him and would not let him run. Yes! Did Stronghold #9 have mental dejection and old-iron lassitude? Was he a copout now in the great life-wars for top-up? Was he old? Was He Old? **WAS HE OLD?**

(Yes! Yes! YES!) But he still dreamed of a Battle. That Meeting-Down-the-Wind seemed planned, and had been for as long as he could think back upon it. Some gigantic contention, with just himself on one side and all the others out there...He would dream a white horse charging, two little new-metal children cheering from the arms of a beautiful new-metal lady, and the Enemy, in all the

colors that would challenge the integrity of all-white, staging the doom-power up. Maybe...maybe...today...?

Stronghold #9 rose from his slinger bed (which rising was a slinging out, at the press of a switch, of all the metal-and-flesh-strip load that he now was) and went at once from his in-bed long-thought to walk upon the parapet of his stark fort, which fort was also termed Stronghold #9. (In these ominous and great times, when men were mostly new-metal held together by a few flesh-strips where green fluids coursed in tube-miles, and metal brain pans sloshed for real chemical thinking, the protector-complex—that is, the Stronghold—and the man “replaced” were one and the same designation. Stronghold 9, the man; Stronghold 9, the fort. YES! And, in a way, a man now really was but a little fort that strolled, what with all his new-metal shell protecting toward peril—and peril all everywhere!)

Round and round he slumped now under the slate-grey vapor shield of that December day, and a district seasons-weather automatic seeing him plod gave him a wind thumb, depressed the cold-gales button to let a chill and whistly movement of wintry atmosphere attend his meditations. Sometimes, in their locked-on menialities, the lowly civil servants of a place, through instinct, perceive a thing clearer and more thoroughly than they ever could through brain. Our December attender in weather control for the district that encompassed Stronghold 9 could clearly ascertain, by the downburdened shoulders, the low-bent head and the *think think think* of the round and round on the parapet, that here walked a man with a Stronghold load of tough thoughts in his brain pans and tremendous hurts across his pain baffles. So why not flip him the wind digit to go with his terrible despair and let him leg old worry-and-woe out in a hurricane gale? Pour it on! It it had been flesh times and Old Days, I strongly do suspect that this little weather civil attender was the type who would have spirited the grieved one’s new maroon scarf from Christmas back to the store in a snow-down, to pay in on Easter eggs (it was that bad!)—just to let the worrier savor better the weather and tough times as he strode the anxious planks.

But The Trip comes on headlong, and The Trip does bloom full-scale, no matter what’s a what or who’s a who. The Trip does get us on the legs we trip; The Trip does take us on the legs we sit. The Trip is a getter and a taker. Yes! THE TRIP! Like old elephants, hide-slack and sick, tremble-lumbering home to ancient pachyderm grave sites; like old dogs in the Old Years succumbing for many a kennel-bed day and then upping on a last morning to break out and run run run that final doggy dash, many and many a mile, as if to shake the Dread Thing down the wind—but nothing shakes it. It is the no-shake shaker of us all. YES!

It was written large in the founding contracts of Moderan that no Stronghold master “with his flesh-strips few and played-down and the bulk of him new-metal man now” would ever have to face Last Call and go The Trip. But things are what Things are. Wave a contract at it and say ha! I don’t have to. HA! HO! HEE!.....REFUSE to be old!! CRAP!!!

Tweettllleoo! Tweettllleoo! tweettllleoo! tweety! tweety! tweet! Well, there it was. The L-Tower people were beaming him. In an under edge of his mind he had suspected that they probably would. Any day now. “GREETINGS, STRONGHOLD 9, MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT, GREAT MASTER IN

YOUR OWN RIGHT, MOST VAUNTED WARRIOR OF MODERAN, AND MISSILE HERO OF THE WORLD, YOUR NOW ASSIGNMENT IS—" He switched it off. He didn't listen to any more. He didn't need to. He knew what was going on. The same thing had happened, less than a month ago, to old-line Stronghold 6, where young-smartass Stronghold 3,159,813,425.6 (new model!) had just moved in and now ruled large. (With a lot of gimmicky new smartass ideas on how to run a gun-down for a world shoot-out.) Yes, metal-fatigue, tube-mile obstructions and plaque in the brain pans were setting in on the old line. (Cite your contract! File a grievance! Threaten to sue! Make them live-up! Who? Who? WHO?) HO! L-Tower was the governing body of Moderan.

So with shrouds in the sky, the cloud bags like death's-heads in the wind's push, and the dark birds of Ending edging their terrible wing-jerk on to flock the air with symbol-tone, Stronghold 9 would go down toward where it was supposed to be for him—take the roll-go to go The Trip.—As had been his wont, always, he had prepared himself the best he could for victory and this day. Knowing full well his hinge joints now, laboring, would not be half so lightning-fast and reflex-sure as once they had been easily, for a whole week he had plied them with the best oil that there was. From the great parts-and-replacement warehouses high on old Redo Row he had brought up new flexers for his lungs—well back—thinking what a bad terrible thing should one or two less-efficient whiffs of the skull-and-crossbones air do him down, be the difference, in some horrid near-equal Last Combat. The age-use aberrations of the eyes he had countered with fine-line adjustments of the best lenses to be had in all wide Moderan. His heart he had checked and valve-tightened; the piston strokes were adjusted combat-rate—one-more-time.

Now for The Enemy! And what would he be like? Old 9 had always wondered about the Last Enemy. Even in the great great times of the world-gun-down winnings for him, when all his world at his new-metal feet bussed ground, and the very cosmos seemed his renown plane, when the flame-ball sun danced for him in very heaven it almost seemed and his picture, flown large and blown flattering, swung for world reverence tall over all the Moderan miles, he had wondered. On a little back edge of his mind, yes, he had! Even when young and at thrust into the most beautiful new-metal maidens for a *jug-a-jug jab-a-jab upsa garu garu garu boom-a-boom-A-BOOM-AYYYY...uh uh uh ohuu.....* he had known the cold thought. (The iced question was never in all his life entirely out of his mind, let's admit it.)

Maybe HE would come on a dark horse shaped like a launcher, and he, #9, could counter with Old White. If he'll show his head, I'll blast him! thought #9. If he wants to fight me one-on-one, we'll do it! I and my fort against him where he stands. I'll give him the Grandpa Wumps, the high-up weird-screaming wreck-wrecks, the White-Witch missiles bite and the doll bombs as they run. I'll slap his guts shreddy with my new cosmos-range seek-and-destroy man-blammers. I'll dice him down like pickles in the Old Times, with my multi-head slaw sludgies. He'll wish he'd never—

Tweettlleooo! tweettlleooo! tweettlleooo! tweety! tweety! tweet! (L-Tower!) "START ROLL-GO 11:42 1/5 CURRENT; BE SPOT 0 NOON." (Going in on Spot 0 at high noon! Well, L-Tower could be expected—diabolic, cynical, ambivalent unto the end.)

No one had ever told him how it would be, and there had been nowhere in his life for him to learn much about how it would be. They had never given him seminars on this thing, which thing was, may be, the most important aspect of them all. And the workshops on the Last Enemy were never held. He had to rely on instinct, that intuition still deep-locked in his flesh-strips "weaknesses" from the ages long and gone. Being a warrior, and naturally battle-ordained as one of Moderan's most prestigious shooters, he somehow pictured something final and grand done under combat flags and eagles on steel wings. And perhaps, the night just prior to the Great Last Battle, flooding along the sky the distant sounds of faultless music would be pealing, stirring and clear, for a last-farewell cotillion. And the beautiful new-metal maidens wearing their little iron frillies... "Oh, wear this next to your pumper, Love, for me!" "I WILL!...and I'll come back..."

But alas, it is most true, most of the locked tough battles are done in the somehow numbing chill, in the clenched-hands four-walls agony of the spirit willed to no-tears—no tears for Them to scoff at, no tears for you hidden, either. (No music sends us in, and no music brings us out!) And combat is essentially just a matter of attacking in there, when the artillery goes all still, and pounding Pounding POUNDING until something gives away ground, either their resolve defending or your attacking verve. If you come out walking, or even crawling—still able to move some distance up or back, you will know you have done very well. If they litter you out, cold-out on some stretcher bound for death, you must beg forgiveness of all the proud ghosts of past combat and all the fast eagles of war, for somehow you will know that something quite foul befell. YOU. Instead of THEM (THE OTHERS) being down—kicked, hammered, bludgeoned, sliced, diced, dismembered, chopped, sausaged, clobbered, gut-jellied, clubbed, liquefied, gassified, cremated, rendered-out, annihilated, destroyed, finally-finished-done—it is Y O U, most personal PERSONAL YOU. This is a matter of caring. A way of being a man. In Moderan.

So what was that down there!? Very small ants crawling, black and in multitudes far down on the plastic fields? Stronghold #9 stopped on a little rise for a little while, switched dead the roller-road, unlocked from his post stand, lifted out of his foot wells, edged off the roller sheet and surveyed the distances below. The voice from L-Tower had directed him to entrain to a certain spot; that spot was in his sharp Moderan vision now and calibrated in; that spot was surrounded by the small spots crawling the slow and circular crawl. "Inexorable, that's the word I think of," muttered Stronghold #9. (It was a *phfluggee-phflaggee* mutter.) "No last and final Big Dragon?? Just little—...growlies.....!?"

"YOU WILL GO ALONE. YOU WILL CARRY NOTHING BUT YOURSELF. YOU ARE THE FINAL WEAPON, FINALLY YOU. GOOD LUCK, GOOD HUNTING, AND GOOD DAY, GOOD OLD MASTER 9, *huk huk huk*," the L-Tower voice had said. (GOOD DAY??)

He unloaded off the roll-go down by that HARD plastic spot there on the plastic plains, just a bundle of tired old iron and old flesh-strip tube miles now, and a brain that sloshed less than clear-thinking in the too-old chemical pans. How pathetic he was! How pathetic they all were away from their guards and

their guns, even in the best of times! But this was One of Them old now, old and unhomed, afoot and alone, sent down here to Spot 0, by L-Tower orders. Spot 0! How he had dreaded it! But this at last, and surely, was the final acid test. This clearly was what all the preparation—all the battles, all the lessons, all the loves—had all ever been about, since that very very first day so long and foggy back ago in the dark antiquity of the ignorance and prehistory of flesh-fouled Olderan, when mother's big birthday effort had unloaded him into the cold.

His first urge here was to panic, turn it all off and self-destruct, which power—if not the right—was surely his. But he ruled that out at once, with an iron will such as few iron wills have ever been before. Now now, not for worlds, not ever—even in a truly hopeless and foregone bad situation of encircling doom and all hell breaking wild—would he, with a cowardly move, negate all the proud battles ever he had won for God, self and L-Tower. Nor would he besmirch even one metal thread of those proud pennons-to-victory that now hung as glory reminders high over his fort and encircled his fort's Brag Tower day and night like giant airborne fangs pulled from dragons most hell-foul and vanquished. No! not this old 9. At that small, shining moment at Spot 0 it just may be that this old master climbed to more sparkling sunlight, glory and elan than he ever had before even come close to. It probably was truly his very shiniest space.

The L-Tower voice came again into his set, booming and bouncy: "CONGRATULATIONS, STRONGHOLD 9. YOU HAVE UNLOADED OFF DOWN THERE AT DESTINATION SPOT 0 IN VERY NEARLY RECORD MOVEMENT. YOUR EXEMPLARY ACTIONS TODAY HAVE ALREADY, QUITE CLEARLY AND IN ALL TRUTH, ADDED NEW LUSTER TO YOUR ALREADY MEDAL-LOADED FAME. BUT NOW, SO THAT WE MAY 'GO OFF' OUR SETS AND ENJOY NOON HOUR, WE NEED YOU TO KNOW YOUR PROJECTED READINGS FOR NOW CAMPAIGN. REPLY PLEASE."

#9 answered L-Tower: "We'll start, as has been our wont always on the lower readings, to 'feel' the Enemy. As the fighting waxes warm, we'll take it up to high, Higher and HIGHEST, until, at the zenith of battle—and you can count on this!—we're sure to be on MAX!" He eavesdropped his set then (perhaps at such a stark time for him he could be forgiven this one small transgression) and he heard two off-frequency voices far in L-Tower, one saying in proudest exultation, "I JUST knew it!" and the other in derision judging, "Damned fool! Doesn't he know what's going on down there?"

The official voice from L-Tower said: "THANK YOU, AND GOOD HUNTING. WE'LL BE BACK TO PICK YOU UP LATER."

He stood down ready now from the roll-go track, tall as he could and proud, a battle tank geared for war; and there was something of the high singing in his tube miles again, as it had always been with him combat-bound, either in Old Days or now. (But this only for such a little while—now—oh, briefly.) Then empty pieces of soul attacked him—fiercely, it seemed to him—and mocked him high in his mind's sky where they stormed. The real clouds, shroud-resembling, moaned and mewed in the slate-gray vapor-shield over him as they slid up and back and across on December; a music was from somewhere far away and cold. Then the doombirds moved up from down sky where they had for so long been circling in a holding pattern for death. The ribbon flocks flashed

out to cove him with shadows, and the wing bundles broke on cue, exploded and came on with that peculiar sizzling sound of thin metal surfaces in swift movement dividing air. Old 9 looked up, and he knew...a strange strange feeling...He moved in on them then—forward—the Great Last Battle—...and no weapon now but him, by himself with no breastworks...lone...alone...oh, lonely...high noon!

At the end of noon hour they resurrected their sets' power and tried again for old 9. No answer came in their phones across the plastic miles from Spot 0. They flipped to Area Scan and got the distinct sounds of savage growling, and also they heard those peculiar small plippy noises that new-metal makes across plastic-yard-sheet ground when dragged. "They've just now got him down! They're mauling him and they're dragging him!" said L-Tower FIP Z-U.

"Anyone else, they'd have had him in shreds long ago," judged L-Tower SPAG O-N Z-U. "Shall we throw the Viewers on him?"

"Nah, too expensive," said FIP Z-U. "Just for a death. He's a tough old tank, but we know what's going on down there. The little growlies'll gulp his edibles after a hot time tearing him to pieces and fighting over his strips. And then they'll stack his tin for us.—In payment for all that fun fighting and a bite to eat for lunch, *huk huk huk*."

"And we'll send the rubbish cart down for him in the morning, early—if we think about it—and rush his 'remains' into Tall Pots at Melt Back."

"Naturally."

"With the usual rewards for the toggle scavengers, the switch retrievers and the circuit-breaker vigilantes, of course."

"Right-as-feedback, naturally and for sure! Those things are sometimes as-is reusable!"

The L-Tower people yawned the boredom yawn for a bit then and after recording how he went—"Went tough"—they quietly, methodically, punched the destruct-and-destroy buttons to "take down" all those proud flags and all those pennons like dragon fangs flying—strung to victory—far away on the bastions and battlements of Stronghold #9. And then, in preparation for the next master, and with no more thought and ceremony than in the Old Days the squashing to death of a flea, they switch-toggled his number to zero (0) in Moderan's decurtate *The Automated Book of the Strongholds and Heroes*.

David R. Bunch

David R. Bunch's short, idiosyncratic stories have, almost invariably, been met with varying degrees of outrage from readers unwilling to work with his convoluted prose to reach the plot that to most is opaque. In his own way Bunch is one of the most original and creative writers in the genre, and it is unfortunate that the conservative bent of most readers is such that he is not given the attention he deserves.

The bulk of his work has been a loosely

organized series set against the background of Moderan, several dozen of which have been collected as a book under that title. Moderan is a thoroughly repulsive future to rank with the Nebishes of T.J. Bass. Humans have acquired immortality, or as near to it as matters, through replacement of most of their body parts with metal. In fact, only a few flesh strips remain, the tiniest trace of humanity. Their physical transformation is matched by their emotional one. Most

humans live in highly armed castles, called Strongholds. The protagonist of most of the series is Stronghold Ten, a man who early in the series is fitted with metallic limbs and organs, and makes use of his determination to make himself the foremost warmaker in the land. He alternates between highly mechanized combat and resting in his hip-snuggie chair within his stronghold, watching the sky change color as each month a new vapor shield is erected, or gazing out across his garden of metal flowers.

David R. Bunch comments:

"I do not write mainly to glorify the scientific accomplishments of mankind or to predict how more and more unbelievably astounding those accomplishments are apt to be. And they are, I am convinced, destined to be astounding, increasingly frightening. But I am much haunted by many questions and a wistful wondering concerning the true worth of man in his spaceship outbound for the stars. Aren't "stars" right here the main stars we should be true-headed for and in-bound toward? Is not that elusive Light of Godly humanness locked and hidden in the obscured soul of man our main objective? And shouldn't the other stars whirling "out there" be regarded as the inscrutable business of God?

"But because I do have these heart

questionings and this wistful wondering concerning importances, it must make of my science fiction writings something other than a glorification of hard science. I write what the trade knows as "soft" science fiction, wherein social statement is as important as the soul-less telling of how a piece of machinery behaves. In many ways I am almost anti-science in my science-fiction writings. I believe we have upped too much our search for greater and still greater technological triumphs and lessened to our loss the quest for a clearer and brighter understanding of that sometimes blinding Light which is, or should be, our very sacred souls.

"So I write not to shout-scream the glories of our great science breakthroughs, or to predict even greater thrusts. I write with more urgent business in mind: to make the reader "see", through my sometimes grim social statements and my often stark satirical comments—both apt to be perverse, even cynical—what worship of science may do in irretrievable detriment to Man and his Earth.

"Did human kind come this far on our faltering, seeking, sometimes glorious course only to dehumanize ourselves and become of no greater significance than the machines themselves that once we used as an aid in our search for significances?"

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The Hall of Fame allows today's noted writers and our readers to indulge in a nostalgic look at stories from Amazing's Golden Past.

ISAAC ASIMOV

Marooned Off Vesta

"MAROONED OFF VESTA" was begun on July 20, 1938 and completed on July 30. In those early days, it took me ten days (and sometimes longer) to write a short story. After all, I was in my junior year at college and, when I wasn't at college, I was taking my turn in the family candy-store. An occasional half-hour in hiding from school and family was all I could manage.

It was the third story I wrote with intent to commit publication. The first story was never published; the second story was rejected by seven magazines before finally finding a home two years later. So the third story, "Marooned off Vesta" was the first story I ever sold—and with only one rejection *en route*.

I don't know that the purchase was an easy decision for Ray Palmer, then editor of *Amazing*. He held it for six weeks before letting me hear from him, but I was

extraordinarily patient in those days for I didn't dare be anything else.

Finally, on October 21, 1938, I received a very kind letter from him, along with a check for \$64, which was standard payment for 6400 words in those days. The excitement in my house you can't imagine.

I framed that acceptance letter. It was on gray paper and had been typed with a dead ribbon so that from a distance of even ten feet, it looked for all the world as though I had framed a blank sheet of paper. I didn't object. People came closer out of curiosity and then they could read those golden words that I might otherwise have been too modest to repeat.

I have made (quite literally) thousands of sales since, some for a thousand times and more the value of that original check, but the sale of "Marooned off Vesta" is the one that lives most clearly in my memory. And rightly so, of course.

—Isaac Asimov



Illustrated by Steve Fabian

"Will you please stop walking up and down like that?" said Warren Moore from the couch. "It won't do any of us any good. Think of our blessings; we're airtight, aren't we?"

Mark Brandon whirled and ground his teeth at him. "I'm glad you feel happy about that," he spat out viciously. "Of course, you don't know that our air supply will last only three days." He resumed his interrupted stride with a defiant air.

Moore yawned and stretched, assumed a more comfortable position, and replied, "Expending all that energy will only use it up faster. Why don't you take a hint from Mike here? He's taking it easy."

"Mike" was Michael Shea, late a member of the crew of the *Silver Queen*. His short, squat body was resting on the only chair in the room and his feet were on the only table. He looked up as his name was mentioned, his mouth widening in a twisted grin.

"You've got to expect things like this to happen sometimes," he said. "Bucking the asteroids is risky business. We should've taken the hop. It takes longer, but it's the only safe way. But no, the captain wanted to make the schedule; he would go through"—Mike spat disgustedly—"and here we are."

"What's the 'hop'?" asked Brandon.

"Oh, I take it that friend Mike means that we should have avoided the asteroid belt by plotting a course outside the plane of the ecliptic," answered Moore. "That's it, isn't it, Mike?"

Mike hesitated and then replied cautiously, "Yeah—I guess that's it."

Moore smiled blankly and continued, "Well, I wouldn't blame Captain Crane too much. The repulsion screen must have failed five minutes before that chunk of granite barged into us. That's not his fault, though of course we ought to have steered clear instead of relying on the screen." He shook his head meditatively. "The *Silver Queen* just went to pieces. It's really miraculously lucky that this part of the ship remained intact, and what's more, airtight."

"You've got a funny idea of luck, Warren," said Brandon. "Always have, for

as long as I've known you. Here we are in a tenth part of a spaceship, comprising only three whole rooms, with air for three days, and no prospect of being alive after that, and you have the infernal gall to prate about luck."

"Compared to the others who died instantly when the asteroid struck, yes," was Moore's answer.

"You think so, eh? Well, let me tell you that instant death isn't so bad compared with what we're going to have to go through. Suffocation is a damned unpleasant way of dying."

"We may find a way out," Moore suggested hopefully.

"Why not face facts!" Brandon's face was flushed and his voice trembled. "We're done, I tell you! Through!"

Mike glanced from one to the other doubtfully and then coughed to attract their attention. "Well, gents, seeing that we're all in the same fix, I guess there's no use hogging things." He drew a small bottle out of his pocket that was filled with greenish liquid. "Grade A Jabra this is. I ain't too proud to share and share alike."

Brandon exhibited the first signs of pleasure for over a day. "Martian Jabra water. Why didn't you say so before?"

But as he reached for it, a firm hand clamped down upon his wrist. He looked up into the calm blue eyes of Warren Moore.

"Don't be a fool," said Moore, "there isn't enough to keep us drunk for three days. What do you want to do? Go on a tear now and then die cold sober? Let's save this for the last six hours when the air gets stuffy and breathing hurts—then we'll finish the bottle among us and never know when the end comes, or care."

Brandon's hand fell away reluctantly. "Damn it, Warren, you'd bleed ice if you were cut. How can you think straight at a time like this?" He motioned to Mike and the bottle was once more stowed away. Brandon walked to the porthole and gazed out.

Moore approached and placed a kindly arm over the shoulders of the younger man. "Why take it so hard, man?" he

asked. "You can't last at this rate. Inside of twenty-four hours you'll be a madman if you keep this up."

There was no answer. Brandon stared bitterly at the globe that filled almost the entire porthole, so Moore continued, "Watching Vesta won't do you any good either."

Mike Shea lumbered up to the porthole. "We'd be safe if we were only down there on Vesta. There're people there. How far away are we?"

"Not more than three or four hundred miles judging from its apparent size," answered Moore. "You must remember that it is only two hundred miles in diameter."

"Three hundred miles from salvation," murmured Brandon, "and we might as well be a million. If there were only a way to get ourselves out of the orbit this rotten fragment adopted. You know, manage to give ourselves a push so as to start falling. There'd be no danger of crashing if we did, because that midget hasn't got enough gravity to crush a cream puff."

"It has enough to keep us in the orbit," retorted Brandon. "It must have picked us up while we were lying unconscious after the crash. Wish it had come closer; we might have been able to land on it."

"Funny place, Vesta," observed Mike Shea. "I was down there two-three times. What a dump! It's all covered with some stuff like snow, only it ain't snow. I forget what they call it."

"Frozen carbon dioxide?" prompted Moore.

"Yeah, dry ice, that carbon dioxide stuff, that's it. They say that's what makes Vesta so shiny."

"Of course! That would give it a high albedo."

Mike cocked a suspicious eye at Moore and decided to let it pass. "It's hard to see anything down there on account of the snow, but if you look close"—he pointed—"you can see a sort of gray smudge. I think that's Bennett's dome. That's where they keep the observatory. And there is Calorn's dome up there. That's a fuel station, that is. There're plenty more, too, only I don't see them."

He hesitated and then turned to Moore.

"Listen, boss, I've been thinking. Wouldn't they be looking for us as soon as they hear about the crash? And wouldn't we be easy to find from Vesta, seeing we're so close?"

Moore shook his head, "No, Mike, they won't be looking for us. No one's going to find out about the crash until the *Silver Queen* fails to turn up on schedule. You see, when the asteroid hit, we didn't have time to send out an SOS"—he sighed—"and they won't find us down there at Vesta, either. We're so small that even at our distance they couldn't see us unless they knew what they were looking for, and exactly where to look."

"Hmm." Mike's forehead was corrugated in deep thought. "Then we've got to get to Vesta before three days are up."

"You've got the gist of the matter, Mike. Now, if we only knew how to go about it, eh?"

Brandon suddenly exploded, "Will you two stop this infernal chitter-chatter and do something? For God's sake, do something."

Moore shrugged his shoulders and without answer returned to the couch. He lounged at ease, apparently carefree, but there was the tiniest crease between his eyes which bespoke concentration.

There was no doubt about it; they were in a bad spot. He reviewed the events of the preceding day for perhaps the twentieth time.

After the asteroid had struck, tearing the ship apart, he'd gone out like a light; for how long he didn't know, his own watch being broken and no other timepiece available. When he came to, he found himself, along with Mark Brandon, who shared his room, and Mike Shea, a member of the crew, sole occupants of all that was left of the *Silver Queen*.

This remnant was now careening in an orbit about Vesta. At present, things were fairly comfortable. There was a food supply that would last a week. Likewise there was a regional Gravitator under the room that kept them at normal weight and would continue to do so for an indefinite time, certainly for longer than the air would last. The lighting system was less satisfactory but had held on so far.

There was no doubt, however, where

the joker in the pack lay. Three days' air! Not that there weren't other disheartening features. There was no heating system—though it would take a long time for the ship to radiate enough heat into the vacuum of space to render them too uncomfortable. Far more important was the fact that their part of the ship had neither a means of communication nor a propulsive mechanism. Moore sighed. One fuel jet in working order would fix everything, for one blast in the right direction would send them safely to Vesta.

The crease between his eyes deepened. What was to be done? They had but one spacesuit among them, one heat ray, and one detonator. That was the sum total of space appliances after a thorough search of the accessible parts of the ship. A pretty hopeless mess, that.

Moore shrugged, rose, and drew himself a glass of water. He swallowed it mechanically, still deep in thought, when an idea struck him. He glanced curiously at the empty cup in his hand.

"Say, Mike," he said, "what kind of water supply have we? Funny that I never thought of that before."

Mike's eyes opened to their fullest extent in an expression of ludicrous surprise. "Didn't you know, boss?"

"Know *what*?" asked Moore impatiently.

"We've got all the water there was." He waved his hand in an all-inclusive gesture. He paused, but as Moore's expression showed nothing but total mystification, he elaborated, "Don't you see? We've got the main tank, the place where all the water for the whole ship was stored." He pointed to one of the walls.

"Do you mean to say that there's a tank full of water adjoining us?"

Mike nodded vigorously, "Yep! Cubic vat a hundred feet each way. And she's three-quarters full."

Moore was astonished. "Seven hundred fifty thousand cubic feet of water." Then suddenly: "Why hasn't it run out through the broken pipes?"

"It only has one main outlet, which runs down the corridor just outside this room. I was fixing that main when the asteroid hit and had to shut it off. After I came to I

opened the pipe leading to our faucet, but that's the only outlet open now."

"Oh." Moore had a curious feeling way down deep inside. An idea had half-formed in his brain, but for the life of him he could not drag it onto the light of day. He knew only that there was something in what he had just heard that had some important meaning but he just could not place his finger on it.

Brandon, meanwhile, had been listening to Shea in silence, and now he emitted a short, humorless laugh. "Fate seems to be having its fill of fun with us, I see. First, it puts us within arm's reach of a place of safety and then sees to it that we have no way of getting there.

"Then she provides us with a week's food, three days' air, and a year's supply of water. A year's supply, do you hear me? Enough water to drink and to gargle and to wash and to take baths in and—and to do anything else we want. Water—damn the water!"

"Oh, take a less serious view, Mark," said Moore in an attempt to break the younger man's melancholy. "Pretend we're a satellite of Vesta—which we are. We have our own period of revolution and of rotation. We have an equator and an axis. Our 'north pole' is located somewhere toward the top of the porthole, pointing toward Vesta, and our 'south' sticks out away from Vesta through the water tank somewhere. Well, as a satellite, we have an atmosphere, and now, you see, we have a newly discovered ocean.

"And seriously, we're not so badly off. For the three days our atmosphere will last, we can eat double rations and drink ourselves soggy. Hell, we have water enough to throw away—"

The idea which had been half-formed before suddenly sprang to maturity and was nailed. The careless gesture with which he had accompanied the last remark was frozen in mid-air. His mouth closed with a snap and his head came up with a jerk.

But Brandon, immersed in his own thoughts, noticed nothing of Moore's strange actions. "Why don't you complete the analogy to a satellite," he

sneered, "or do you, as a Professional Optimist, ignore any and all disagreeable facts? If I were you, I'd continue this way." Here he imitated Moore's voice: "The satellite is at present habitable and inhabited but, due to the approaching depletion of its atmosphere in three days, is expected to become a dead world.

"Well, why don't you answer? Why do you persist in making a joke out of this? Can't you see—*What's the matter?*"

The last was a surprised exclamation and certainly Moore's actions did merit surprise. He had risen suddenly and, after giving himself a smart rap on the forehead, remained stiff and silent, staring into the far distance with gradually narrowing eyelids. Brandon and Mike Shea watched him in speechless astonishment.

Suddenly Moore burst out, "Ha! I've got it. Why didn't I think of it before?" His exclamations degenerated into the unintelligible.

Mike drew out the Jabra bottle with a significant look, but Moore waved it away impatiently. Whereupon Brandon, without any warning, lashed out with his right, catching the surprised Moore flush on the jaw and toppling him.

Moore groaned and rubbed his chin. Somewhat indignant, he asked, "What was the reason for that?"

"Stand up and I'll do it again," shouted Brandon, "I can't stand it anymore. I'm sick and tired of being preached at, and having to listen to your Pollyanna talk. You're the one that's going daffy."

"Daffy, nothing! Just a little overexcited, that's all. Listen, for God's sake. I think I know a way—"

Brandon glared at him balefully. "Oh, you do, do you? Raise our hopes with some silly scheme and then find it doesn't work. I won't take it, do you hear? I'll find a real use for the water—drown you—and save some of the air besides."

Moore lost his temper. "Listen, Mark, you're out of this. I'm going through it alone. I don't need your help and I don't want it. If you're that sure of dying and that afraid, why not have the agony over? We've got one heat ray and one detonator, both reliable weapons. Take your choice and kill yourself. Shea and I won't

interfere." Brandon's lip curled in a last weak gesture of defiance and then suddenly he capitulated, completely and abjectly. "All right, Warren, I'm with you. I—I guess I didn't quite know what I was doing. I don't feel well, Warren. I—I—"

"Aw, that's all right, boy." Moore was genuinely sorry for him. "Take it easy. I know how you feel. It's got me too. But you mustn't give in to it. Fight it, or you'll go stark, raving mad. Now you just try and get some sleep and leave everything to me. Things will turn out right yet."

Brandon, pressing a hand to an aching forehead, stumbled to the couch and tumbled down. Silent sobs shook his frame while Moore and Shea remained in embarrassed silence nearby.

At last Moore nudged Mike. "Come on," he whispered, "let's get busy. We're going places. Airlock five is at the end of the corridor, isn't it?" Shea nodded and Moore continued, "Is it airtight?"

"Well," said Shea after some thought, "the inner door is, of course, but I don't know anything about the outer one. For all I know it may be a sieve. You see, when I tested the wall for airtightness, I didn't dare open the inner door, because if there was anything wrong with the outer one—blooey!" The accompanying gesture was very expressive.

"Then it's up to us to find out about that outer door right now. I've got to get outside some way and we'll just have to take chances. Where's the spacesuit?"

He grabbed the lone suit from its place in the cupboard, threw it over his shoulder and led the way into the long corridor that ran down the side of the room. He passed closed doors behind whose airtight barriers were what once had been passenger quarters but which were now merely cavities, open to space. At the end of the corridor was the tight-fitting door of Airlock 5.

Moore stopped and surveyed it appraisingly. "Looks all right," he observed, "but of course you can't tell what's outside, God, I hope it'll work." He frowned. "Of course we could use the entire corridor as an airlock, with the door to our room as the inner door and this as

the outer door, but that would mean the loss of half our air supply. We can't afford that—yet."

He turned to Shea. "All right, now. The indicator shows that the lock was last used for entrance, so it should be full of air. Open the door the tiniest crack, and if there's a hissing noise, shut it quick."

"Here goes," and the lever moved one notch. The mechanism had been severely shaken up during the shock of the crash and its former noiseless workings had given way to a harsh, rasping sound, but it was still in commission. A thin black line appeared on the left-hand side of the lock, marking where the door had slid a fraction of an inch on the runners.

There was no hiss! Moore's look of anxiety faded somewhat. He took a small pasteboard from his pocket and held it against the crack. If air were leaking, that card should have held there, pushed by the escaping gas. It fell to the floor.

Mike Shea stuck a forefinger in his mouth and then put it against the crack. "Thank the Lord," he breathed, "not a sign of a draft."

"Good, good. Open it wider. Go ahead."

Another notch and the crack opened further. And still no draft. Slowly, ever so slowly, notch by notch, it creaked its way wider and wider. The two men held their breaths, afraid that while not actually punctured, the outer door might have been so weakened as to give way any moment. But it held! Moore was jubilant as he wormed into the spacesuit.

"Things are going fine so far, Mike," he said. "You sit down right here and wait for me. I don't know how long I'll take, but I'll be back. Where's the heat ray? Have you got it?"

Shea held out the ray and asked, "But what are you going to do? I'd sort of like to know."

Moore paused as he was about to buckle on the helmet. "Did you hear me say inside that we had water enough to throw away?" Well, I've been thinking it over and that's not such a bad idea. I'm going to throw it away." With no other explanation, he stepped into the lock, leaving behind him a very puzzled Mike Shea.

It was with a pounding heart that Moore waited for the outer door to open. His plan was an extraordinary simple one, but it might not be easy to carry out.

There was a sound of creaking gears and scraping ratchets. Air sighed away to nothingness. The door before him slid open a few inches and stuck. Moore's heart sank as for a moment he thought it would not open at all, but after a few preliminary jerks and rattles the barrier slid the rest of the way.

He clicked on the magnetic grapple and very cautiously put a foot out into space. Clumsily he groped his way out to the side of the ship. He had never been outside a ship in open space before and a vast dread overtook him as he clung there, flylike, to his precarious perch. For a moment dizziness overcame him.

He closed his eyes and for five minutes hung there, clutching the smooth sides of what had once been the *Silver Queen*. The magnetic grapple held him firm and when he opened his eyes once more he found his self-confidence in a measure returned.

He gazed about him. For the first time since the crash he saw the stars instead of the vision of Vesta which their porthole afforded. Eagerly he searched the skies for the little blue-white speck that was Earth. It had often amused him that Earth should always be the first object sought by space travelers when star-gazing, but the humor of the situation did not strike him now. However, his search was in vain. From where he lay, Earth was invisible. It, as well as the Sun, must be hidden behind Vesta.

Still, there was much else that he could not help but note. Jupiter was off to the left, a brilliant globe the size of a small pea to the naked eye. Moore observed two of its attendant satellites. Saturn was visible too, as a brilliant planet of some negative magnitude, rivaling Venus as seen from Earth.

Moore had expected that a goodly number of asteroids would be visible—marooned as they were in the asteroid belt—but space seemed surprisingly empty. Once he thought he could see a hurling body pass within a few miles, but so fast had the impression come and gone that he could not swear that it was not fancy.

And then, of course, there was Vesta. Almost directly below him it loomed like a balloon filling a quarter of the sky. It floated steadily, snowy white, and Moore gazed at it with earnest longing. A good hard kick against the side of the ship, he thought, might start him falling toward Vesta. He might land safely and get help for the others. But the chance was too great that he would merely take on a new orbit about Vesta. No, it would have to be better than that.

This reminded him that he had no time to lose. He scanned the side of the ship, looking for the water tank, but all he could see was a jungle of jutting walls, jagged, crumbling, and pointed. He hesitated. Evidently the only thing to do was to make for the lighted porthole to their room and proceed to the tank from there.

Carefully he dragged himself along the wall of the ship. Not five yards from the lock the smoothness stopped abruptly. There was a yawning cavity which Moore recognized as having once been the room adjoining the corridor at the far end. He shuddered. Suppose he were to come across a bloated dead body in one of those rooms. He had known most of the passengers, many of them personally. But he overcame his squeamishness and forced himself to continue his precarious journey toward its goal.

And here he encountered his first practical difficulty. The room itself was made of non-ferrous material in many parts. The magnetic grapple was intended for use only on outer hulls and was useless throughout much of the ship's interior. Moore had forgotten this when suddenly he found himself floating down an incline, his grapple out of use. He gasped and clutched at a nearby projection. Slowly he pulled himself back to safety.

He lay for a moment, almost breathless. Theoretically he should be weightless out here in space—Vesta's influence being negligible—but the regional Gravitator under his room was working. Without the balance of the other Gravitators, it tended to place him under variable and suddenly shifting stresses as he kept changing his position. For his magnetic grapple to let go suddenly might mean being jerked away

from the ship altogether. And then what?

Evidently this was going to be even more difficult than he had thought.

He inched forward in a crawl, testing each spot to see if the grapple would hold. Sometimes he had to make long, circuitous journeys to gain a few feet's headway and at other times he was forced to scramble and slip across small patches of non-ferrous material. And always there was that tiring pull of the Gravitator, continually changing directions as he progressed, setting horizontal floors and vertical walls at queer and almost haphazard angles.

Carefully he investigated all objects that he came across. But it was a barren search. Loose articles, chairs, tables had been jerked away at the first shock, probably, and now were independent bodies of the Solar System. He did manage, however, to pick up a small field glass and fountain pen. These he placed in his pocket. They were valueless under present conditions, but somehow they seemed to make more real this macabre trip across the sides of a dead ship.

For fifteen minutes, twenty, half an hour, he labored slowly toward where he thought the porthole should be. Sweat poured down into his eyes and rendered his hair a matted mass. His muscles were beginning to ache under the unaccustomed strain. His mind, already strained by the ordeal of the previous day, was beginning to waver, to play him tricks.

The crawl began to seem eternal, something that had always existed and would exist forever. The object of the journey, that for which he was striving, seemed unimportant; he only knew that it was necessary to move. The time, one hour back, when he had been with Brandon and Shea, seemed hazy and lost in the far past. That more normal time, two days ago, wholly forgotten.

Only the jagged walls before him, only the vital necessity of getting at some uncertain destination existed in his spinning brain. Grasping, straining, pulling. Feeling for the iron alloy. Up and into gaping holes that were rooms and then out again. Feel and pull—feel and pull—and—a light.

Moore stopped. Had he not been glued

to the wall he would have fallen. Somehow that light seemed to clear things. It was the porthole; not the many dark, staring ones he had passed, but alive and alight. Behind it was Brandon. A deep breath and he felt better, his mind cleared.

And now his way lay plain before him. Toward that spark of life he crept. Nearer, and nearer, and nearer until he could touch it. He was there!

His eyes drank in the familiar room. God knows that it hadn't any happy associations in his mind, but it was something real, something almost natural. Brandon slept on the couch. His face was worn and lined but a smile passed over it now and then.

Moore raised his fist to knock. He felt the urgent desire to talk with someone, if only by sign language; yet at the last instant he refrained. Perhaps the kid was dreaming of home. He was young and sensitive and had suffered much. Let him sleep. Time enough to wake him when—and if—his idea had been carried through.

He located the wall within the room behind which lay the water tank and then tried to spot it from the outside. Now it was not difficult; its rear wall stood out prominently. Moore marveled, for it seemed a miracle that it had escaped puncture. Perhaps the Fates had not been so ironic after all.

Passage to it was easy though it was on the other side of the fragment. What was once a corridor led almost directly to it. Once when the *Silver Queen* had been whole, that corridor had been level and horizontal, but now, under the unbalanced pull of the regional gravitator, it seemed more of a steep incline than anything else. And yet it made the path simple. Since it was of uniform beryl-steel, Moore found no trouble holding on as he wormed up the twenty-odd feet to the water supply.

And now the crisis—the last stage—had been reached. He felt that he ought to rest first, but his excitement grew rapidly in intensity. It was either now or bust. He pulled himself out to the bottom-center of the tank. There, resting on the small ledge formed by the floor of the corridor that had once extended on that side of the tank, he began operations.

"It's a pity that the main pipe is pointing in the wrong direction," he muttered. "It would have saved me a lot of trouble had it been right. As it is..." He sighed and bent to his work. The heat ray was adjusted to maximum concentration and the invisible emanations focused at a spot perhaps a foot above the floor of the tank.

Gradually the effect of the excitatory beam upon the molecules of the wall became noticeable. A spot the size of a dime began shining faintly at the point of focus of the ray gun. It wavered uncertainly, now dimming, now brightening, as Moore strove to steady his tired arm. He propped it on the ledge and achieved better results as the tiny circle of radiation brightened.

Slowly the color ascended the spectrum. The dark, angry red that had first appeared lightened to a cherry color. As the heat continued pouring in, the brightness seemed to ripple out in widening areas, like a target made of successively deepening tints of red. The wall for a distance of some feet from the focal point was becoming uncomfortably hot even though it did not glow and Moore found it necessary to refrain from touching it with the metal of his suit.

Moore cursed steadily, for the ledge itself was also growing hot. It seemed that only imprecations could soothe him. And as the melting wall began to radiate heat in its own right, the chief objects of his maledictions were the spacesuit manufacturers. Why didn't they build a suit that could keep heat out as well as keep it in?"

But what Brandon called Professional Optimism crept up. With the salt tang of perspiration in his mouth, he kept consoling himself, "It could be worse, I suppose. At least, the two inches of wall here don't present too much of a barrier. Suppose the tank had been built flush against the outer hull. Whew! Imagine trying to melt through a foot of this." He gritted his teeth and kept on.

The spot of brightness was now flickering into the orange-yellow and Moore knew that the melting point of the beryl-steel alloy would soon be reached. He found himself forced to watch the spot

only at widely spaced intervals and then only for fleeting moments.

Evidently it would have to be done quickly if it were to be done at all. The heat ray had not been fully loaded in the first place, and, pouring out energy at maximum as it had been doing for almost ten minutes now, must be approaching exhaustion. Yet the wall was just barely passing the plastic stage. In a fever of impatience, Moore jammed the muzzle of the gun directly at the center of the spot, drawing it back speedily.

A deep depression formed in the soft metal, but a puncture had not been formed. However, Moore was satisfied. He was almost there now. Had there been air between himself and the wall, he would undoubtedly have heard the gurgling and the hissing of the steaming water within. The pressure was building up. How long would the weakened wall endure?

Then, so suddenly that Moore did not realize it for a few moments, he was through. A tiny fissure formed at the bottom of that little pit made by the ray gun and in less time than it takes to imagine, the churning water within had its way.

The soft, liquid metal at that spot puffed out, sticking out raggedly around a pea-sized hole. And from that hole there came a hissing and a roaring. A cloud of steam emerged and enveloped Moore.

Through the mist, he could see the stream condense almost immediately to ice droplets and saw these icy pellets shrink rapidly into nothingness.

For fifteen minutes he watched the steam shoot out.

Then he became aware of a gentle pressure pushing him away from the ship. A savage joy welled up within him as he realized that this was the effect of acceleration on the ship's part. His own inertia was holding him back.

That meant his work had been finished—and successfully. That stream of water was substituting for the rocket blast.

He started back.

If the horrors and dangers of the journey to the tank had been great, those of the way back should have been greater. He was infinitely more tired, his aching eyes

were all but blind, and added to the crazy pull of the Gravitator was the force induced by the varying acceleration of the ship. But whatever his labors to return, they did not bother him. In later time, he never even remembered the heartbreaking trip.

How he managed to negotiate the distance in safety he did not know. Most of the time he was lost in a haze of happiness, scarcely realizing the actualities of the situation. His mind was filled with one thought only—to get back quickly, to tell the happy news of their escape.

Suddenly he found himself before the airlock. He hardly grasped the fact that it was the airlock. He almost did not understand why he pressed the signal button. Some instinct told him it was the thing to do.

Mike Shea was waiting. There was a creak and a rumble and the outer door started opening, caught, and stopped at the same place as before, but once again it managed to slide the rest of the way. It closed behind Moore, then the inner door opened and he stumbled into Shea's arms.

As in a dream he felt himself half-pulled, half-carried down the corridor to the room. His suit was ripped off. A hot, burning liquid stung his throat. Moore gagged, swallowed, and felt better. Shea pocketed the Jabra bottle once more.

The blurred, shifting images of Brandon and Shea before him steadied and became solid. Moore wiped the perspiration from his face with a trembling hand and essayed a weak smile.

"Wait," protested Brandon, "don't say anything. You look half-dead. Rest, will you!"

But Moore shook his head. In a hoarse, cracked voice he narrated as well as he could the events of the past two hours. The tale was incoherent, scarcely intelligible but marvelously impressive. The two listeners scarcely breathed during the recital.

"You mean," stammered Brandon, "that the water spout is pushing us toward Vesta, like a rocket exhaust?"

"Exactly—same thing as—rocket exhaust," panted Moore.

"Action and reaction. Is located —on

side opposite Vesta—hence pushing us toward Vesta.”

Shea was dancing before the porthole. “He’s right, Brandon, me boy. You can make out Bennett’s dome as clear as day. We’re getting there, we’re getting there.”

Moore felt himself recovering. “We’re approaching in spiral path on account of original orbit. We’ll land in five or six hours probably. The water will last for quite a long while and the pressure is still great, since the water issues as steam.”

“Steam—at the low temperature of space?” Brandon was surprised.

“Steam—at the low pressure of space!” corrected Moore. “The boiling point of water falls with the pressure. It is very low indeed in a vacuum. Even ice has a vapor pressure sufficient to sublime.”

He smiled. “As a matter of fact, it freezes and boils at the same time. I watched it.” A short pause, then, “Well, how do you feel now, Brandon? Much better, eh?”

Brandon reddened and his face fell. He groped vainly for words for a few

moments. Finally he said in a half-whisper, “You know, I must have acted like a damn fool and a coward at first. I—I guess I don’t deserve all this after going to pieces and letting the burden of our escape rest on your shoulders.

“I wish you’d beat me up, or something, for punching you before. It’d make me feel better. I mean it.” And he really did seem to mean it.

Moore gave him an affectionate push. “Forget it. You’ll never know how near I came to breaking down myself.” He raised his voice in order to drown out any further apologies on Brandon’s part. “Hey, Mike, stop staring out of that porthole and bring over that Jabra bottle.”

Mike obeyed with alacrity, bringing with him three Plexatron units to be used as makeshift cups. Moore filled each precisely to the brim. He was going to be drunk with a vengeance.

“Gentlemen,” he said solemnly, “a toast.” The three raised the mugs in unison, “Gentlemen, I give you the year’s supply of good old H₂O we used to have.”

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WARFLOWER

(Earthship, Colony Cruiser Mantis

Date: October 28, 2351, Relative

A hollowed-out asteroid some 61.2 miles at its greatest length and 23 miles in diameter, the Mantis spins leisurely as it drifts on a course that will take its fifth generation of 8,750 colonists in the general direction of Cygnus. They carry their culture with them.)

Dead weeds stood like bristles around the water-filled craters. In places, the thermoplast inner lining of the hull showed through, smooth as oil. Scattered among the weeds, usually half-buried in the mud, little tips of brown bones protruded like the earliest shoot of a flowering bulb. Not long before, one of the contending factions aboard the *Mantis* had gained control of the sunlight filaments that ran through the axis of the ship and had turned them down to a dull orange glow.

An olive drab haze oozed out of the hills and settled in the sodden craters where it rippled almost like water with the damp wind. Down in the fold where one barren hill rolled into another, the slow breeze carried the scents of odd chemistry and carrion, and within the wind, audible to attentive ears, lurked the soft thuds of distant explosions. Where the two hills met, in a low place piled with wet boulders, a dark opening suggested the mouth of a cave.

It was only a shallow place, a shelter from most of the rain and from the blinding mud that filled the sky when contending factions pushed each other across the hills, lobbing low-level explosives ahead of their attacks.

Pag and Kew lay on the smooth dirt floor. Pag had once been a landskeeper in the Ditwiller Forest Remains, but a minor engagement in the forest had made his job irrelevant. Since then he had been a Resident, one who inhabited the barren lands, and he had been questioned so many times that he had all but forgotten his past life.

Pag stared over his hairless arm at the puddles outside the shelter door. A few raindrops made the surface wrinkle for a moment, disturbing the delicate oil patterns on its surface.

Kew moaned. Asleep or not, she always moaned. Pag did not mind. He knew very little about Kew. She was living in the cave when he arrived one day. She remembered no other life. Now she did not remember his arrival, their acquaintance, or how she had come to be in love with him. She moaned again.

Pag drew himself up and looked at his fingernails. He idly wondered if they would ever grow back. Digging their food out of the ground kept his fingertips in a state of constant laceration. Now, instead of having black fingernails, he had brown scabs.

He quietly left the shelter in order not to disturb Kew. The glowing string of orange filaments overhead made the brown hills a deep rust color. The dim flickering of far away explosions made it easier for him to pick his way toward a patch of green he had seen two days before. Perhaps there would be fresh roots there.

"Kew! Kew! Look what I found!" Pag stumbled and scraped his shoulder across a jutting rock at the entryway but he never changed his amazed expression. Before his chest he held his hands, one cupped over the other, as carefully as if he carried his own life there.

Moaning, Kew rolled and turned her face toward him. "Food?" Her eyebrows would have risen, had she had any — but she frowned. She knew Pag would not carry food in such a delicate way.

Kew's face went limp. "What is it?" she asked listlessly, turning her attention, as she always did in hopeless moments, to the growth on her ankle.

"Here, look!" Pag knelt beside her and slowly opened a crack between his hands. "See it?"

Kew could see little in the darkness of the cave until Pag had opened his hands completely. Kew's breath came in short audible hisses. "What is it? A bug?"

It was no bigger than the last joint of her little finger and it moved sluggishly in Pag's palm.

"They used to be all over," he said. "Called crickets. They sing."

Kew's face contracted into a mask of wrinkles as she concentrated on his words. She moved her face slowly very close to the insect. "Sing songs?" she whispered breathlessly.

"Sings bug songs. Like: screeep-screep-screep."

"Really?" Her face filled with wonder. "Look! It moves! It's not dead. I never seen a bug this big before."

"This only . . . is third bug I seen close up. And he's ours!"

"Something besides us and soldiers alive out here! He can live here!" Kew jumped around the shelter, slapping her hands on her thighs. "We got him! He not dead! We got him! He not dead!" She came grinning back to where Pag sat. "Not dead, not dead," she said intensely into his face. "We got something not dead!"

They studied the insect. It held very still, but in the dimness, when Kew put her finger lightly upon its back, she could feel it move.

"Where you find him?"

"Over at No-Bone Hill. By the black-weed bush."

Kew whispered: "What we feed him?"

Pag gently rolled the cricket onto Kew's palm. Her eyes lit up with a joy nearly religious. Pag pulled apart a stack of dirt clods at the far end of the shelter and took out a small yellow canister. "Here." He struggled with the lid, holding it oddly in his painful fingertips. "We got some seed-meal left. Maybe he eats like us."

Kew's lips turned down. "I hate meal."

Pag pried open the lid and put his finger inside. "A few grains left. Here." He held the tin over a flat rock and knocked the bottom with a small stone. A few light-colored grains dropped out. "Put cricket on rock."

Kew did as instructed, handling the living thing with every possible care. The cricket lay on its side a few seconds, then laboriously righted itself.

"Maybe it's sick," Kew said.

"Or scared. We look big. To him."

They watched, their breaths mingling over the insect. It did not move.

Kew suddenly pulled back. "Pag!" she whispered. "You hear?"

He listened. It came again. A clatter of rocks nearby.

"Quick," she hissed. "Hide bug or they kill it. We get punished."

Pag's eyes jerked from side to side of the opening of the shelter, looking for signs of intruders. Then, prepared to risk nothing, he carefully lifted the flat stone on which the insect lay and placed it in the corner of the room. He put several clods of dirt around it to keep the bug from crawling away.

Seconds later, the cave blazed with yellow light.

"Over there," one voice commanded.

Pag and Kew could see only blinding light.

"Not there — other side. Move! Move!"

Pag felt someone kick his leg. He dragged Kew to the other wall.

"Okay. We're Division Manhood, carrying out Operation Reamer, phase three, Seventh Provisional Republic of *Mantis*. Clear?" The lights dimmed. There were three soldiers in black uniforms. The heavy one had three yellow rags tied around his left arm. He was older and seemed to command the other two who carried packs.

"What side you on?" the heavy one asked. He was firm but not unkind-sounding. He had a scar where one ear should have been.

"We not on a side. We Residents," Pag said, the purple images of light still swimming in his eyes.

"Residents, hey?" The heavy one pinched his black eyebrows together with two heavy fingers, as though he were deep in thought. "Show me your Resident's papers."

"Uh . . ."

"Come on!" He gestured to one of the younger men who lifted a short, blunt-ended weapon. "Without papers, you're a pollution. Give me your papers now or we spray you with RD4."

"RD5, sir," said the weapon-holder.

"Right. RD4 was what we used last week. It made your skin fall off. RD5 pops open all your capillaries. So show me your papers."

Kew did not know what capillaries were, but she wept in her hands.

"Sir . . . master! We don't have them. We not pollution. We got hungry. We

mixed the papers with rations. And we ate them."

"You ate your papers?" the heavyset man muttered suspiciously. "You should be sprayed for that. How do we know you aren't Sector Two regular infantry in disguise? Or defoliation researchers? Or just ordinary pollution? Private, search this place."

"No!" Pag begged. "Please, we got only these." He pulled a handful of rags away from his body. "Only clothes and . . ." He wildly looked around the shelter, afraid his eyes would stop on the tiny black thing that he glimpsed still lying on the flat stone. "And only this!" He rushed to the yellow can, the weapon in the soldier's arms gliding along to follow his every step. "Only this!"

"Sir," one of the soldiers said in the leader's ear, "I was here a year ago. I remember these people. They're Residents. They had papers then."

"Maybe," the heavier man said. "Maybe not." He turned to Pag. "You have any seeds?"

"No, master. No seeds."

"You got any living things plant or animal in your possession?"

"Nothing! Everything dead. Everything."

"You know the whereabouts of any living thing plant or animal?"

"No, master, sir. Just us. Her and me."

"Do you commit sex on each other?"

"No, master. We can't. See? I'm sterilized." He lifted his rags and revealed the shriveled twig that stuck crookedly from his groin.

"What about her?"

"Her too." Pag gestured for Kew to lit her rags.

Several inches below her navel, a purple scar twisted across her stomach. At one end of the scar, a tattooed symbol, something like the letter T.

"Ah," the captain said, pointing to the tattoo and sounding pleased. "That's the mark of one of our most excellent physicians." His manner became more relaxed. "Well. You look like Residents, I'll say that much. Good thing you are. We got orders to conserve our spray for only verifiable pollution."

"We not pollution," Kew said.

The weapon-carrier slung the sprayer back over his shoulder.

Kew fell to her knees in front of the leader, her hands clasped in prayer. "Master-sir, please, rations, sir please. We Residents hungry! We have to eat! Please!" She snatched the yellow tin from Pag and held it up to the leader. "Please, rations!"

The man smiled and patted her head. "There, there, young woman. We're generous with our Residents. Can't have a world without people in it. Supply kit, private."

The soldier who had been standing silent the whole time stepped forward with a black case and set it at the leader's feet.

"Well, little girl, we got rations for Residents today." He opened the case and took out a bag of yellow meal and filled her tin.

Kew's eyes glowed with joy. "Thank you, master-sir. Thank you, thank you."

"No problem. We're proud of our Residents."

"Yes sir."

"Yes sir," his men replied to his cue.

"Can't have a country without Residents."

"No sir."

"No sir."

"Now," said the leader, "we have something to make your lives easier. Something our excellent physicians have developed to replace the dark urges of the flesh. It is imperative here in the *Mantis* that we do not have unbridled reproduction, as you well know. On the other hand, we do not expect our Residents to live like saints."

"No sir."

"No sir," his men said.

"Are the inoculations prepared?"

"Yes sir," one of them said.

"Right. The military arm of the Seventh Provisional Republic of *Mantis* recognizes that . . . uh . . . everyone . . ." He paused, staring into vacancy, trying to recall the memorized words. ". . . everyone is entitled to some pleasure in life. So all the sources, um, resources of the Office of Humanitarian Concerns was brung to bear. On the problem. We have here — " (He pointed to the inoculation pistol held by the private.) " — the answer to all your lost desires."

"Sir — " Pag felt his heart begin to jitter. "We are very happy. We have hunger, but we don't have dark desires of the flesh. We — "

"We don't want sex, master," Kew said, now on her feet and backing away. "We had it last year. Save sex for other Residents, master, please."

"We are sterile and very happy, sir."

"Shut up," the leader grumbled. "It's regulations for Residents. So shut up, you mutants."

First they held Pag and then Kew as the leader shot the drug into their backs. Kew squirmed in the men's grip and the jet of chemical hit her spine — her left arm jerked up and bloodied her mouth.

"Goodbye, lucky Residents," the leader said as they gathered their gear and stepped over the two bodies on their way out, leaving Pag and Kew in darkness.

First their minds went blind and the tingling started on the tops of their legs. Then their thighs began to twitch. Their groins hummed electrically and Pag's brain saw and felt and smelled dozens of clean women without tumors or dried blood on their feet, young clean women who touched him and stroked and nuzzled him and covered him with their soft smooth bodies. There was light in his mind and he saw long delicate hands caress his thighs. Smooth full lips kissed him over and over.

Kew knew she was enclosed in the embrace of four strong men who were shaved and clean and did not stink or complain about their hands. These were healthy men, and their hands touched her stomach and breasts, and firm and gentle arms encircled her in a ring of safety.

Pag lost himself in the bodies of his lovers. Moment by moment he felt his body and his consciousness flow away into these women of his dreams. Clear eyes hovered over him. The woman smiled before she kissed him, and as she did, Pag felt himself disappear.

Kew felt herself open wider and wider until in some physical and nonphysical way, she enclosed all four men inside her hot, hope-filled body. Becoming larger with this fulfillment, she sensed in some delightful way that she was becoming more and more tenuous, that the thread of her existence was wearing beautifully thin.

They thrashed and flailed in blind ecstasy. Insensitive to all pain, their minds in

utter darkness, they shrieked and howled and shouted until they spit foam and blood through their clenched teeth. But neither knew this. Neither knew of the other's passion or existence.

Like white bristles around the frozen puddles in crater-bottoms, the weeds stood rigid with frost. The wind carried the soft throb of solid-sounding explosions across the dim, rust-colored hills. Far away, like a flower sprouting from the soil, an explosion lifted a tall cloud of dust and mud toward the orange filaments of light that were strung through the center of the *Mantis*.

In their shelter, Pag and Kew slowly came to their senses and wordlessly helped each other press rags against the bleeding wounds they had given themselves while unconscious.

"It felt good," Pag mumbled.

"It was good, I had forgot," Kew said almost inaudibly. "I'm still hungry."

"We have food now. . . ." His mind cleared a little more. There was no food. The smooth dirt of their shelter was lightly sprinkled with the yellow meal they had been given. In one corner lay the crushed cannister.

"We spilled the food," Kew said.

They sat in silence, pressing the dark wounds until all the bleeding stopped.

"We still have the bug," Kew said. "He will sing for us." She tried to make her voice sound happier. "When we're tired, we will listen to him sing."

They both stiffly got to their feet and went to the corner where the flat rock had lain. It was not there. Nor were the clods Pag had put around it — they lay crushed and scattered with everything else, across the floor.

"Maybe we killed it while we didn't know anything," Kew said.

Pag nodded. "We killed it."

They went to the corner farthest from the door and huddled together.

"After what my mind saw," Kew whispered, "I hate everything in this world more than I did. I feel heavy and slow. I am ugly now."

"Why they want everything to die?" Pag said. "Maybe everything easier for them if everything dead."

"They gave us that shot to make us hate life," Kew said.

"Maybe they want us to die. Kill ourselves, save them their spray."

They sat quietly a moment, both feeling their unutterable exhaustion. Their heads touched and their breaths warmed their faces.

"Kew?" he whispered. "You still love me?"

"Yes."

"I too."

"Yes."

(The Earthship *Mantis* drifts through space, carrying life toward worlds yet undiscovered. They bring with them many things.) ●

THE AUTHOR COMMENTS

I don't like this place very much.

Let me explain: If I were going to write a story which took place on an extraordinarily evil world, I would design it so that the inhabitants were never sure if the world were

defective or if *they* were. Just enough good stuff would happen to them that there would be endless debates about whether the world was really good or evil. No one would ever be quite sure. As some

genetically defective wimp hobbled down the street on his diseased feet, he would find a ten-dollar bill — and he would never be sure if he should be thankful for the money or if it was only more misfortune because it made him more tolerant of his life. And then, in this imaginary world, I would arrange it so that all people, no matter what their fortune or misfortune, would end up with death sentences. That's how I would design an evil place.

"Warflower" does not take place in that kind of evil world. I have been told that it is a depressing story, but I do not find it so. The world of "Warflower" and the world in which you are sitting as you read this are

much the same. They both contain an element that I would leave out of the evil place.

It is that element which allows us to ignore the question of whether something is good or evil or real or unreal or whether there is a design or there isn't. When one person can look into another and say, "Yes," then everything else, the setting, their situation, their fates, *everything else*, is irrelevant, and they are happy and they are at the center of the universe.

"Warflower" is about two people who categorically refuse to hate their world; it is a story of strength. That is why I like it.

A MEMORY OF THE FUTURE #1

Whose life—whose failings
Are mapped as human: bluely shining
Her fears & hopes obliquely viewed
As the four-space projection of invisible machines
Levels of psycho-technic energy
In their mass societies are growing ever greater
& can be gauged most accurately, & quickly
By the foetal-based responses
They begin their probe there
—Turn thoughts back toward night, then noon
Til Eros & Thanatos are rising & descending nodes
In the dawn skies of that memory
—**Robert Frazier & Andrew Joron**

TOM CUMMINS

DANCER IN THE RUINS

The wind caressed Ladetta's face as she pirouetted from crumbled stone steps to the mashed roof of a '98 Chevy-Lotus. She fast-shuffled across the roof and leaped lithely to the broken asphalt below.

From my vantage point on Grody's shattered terrace, I had a magnificent view of her milky breasts. So did Arlanza, who was perched on a giant stone block not too far from her.

"But why can't I be your lover?" Lanza whined, "I'm as good as any of these muffs around here."

Ladetta spun to him and did several kick leaps around his perch as she answered musically, "Lanza, you do the beast well, and I adore you. But we can never be one. You cannot share my frequency. Nor would you be happy."

It was an old refrain, one I'd heard thousands of times before. So had Lanza. The kid should have known better, should have quit pining away for her. But still he persisted. Ah, the vagaries of youth. Big talker. I'm only twenty-seven myself.

Lanza watched adoringly as Ladetta somersaulted up to his seat and moved soothingly in front of him.

"Please, are you not satisfied with the moments we *do* share?" Ladetta asked.

"They are too short for me!" Arlanza wailed, "I need you for my own!"

Ladetta stopped momentarily in exasperation, her silver robe settling about her.

"You have been told by many others, including myself!" Ladetta snapped, "Quite frankly, I grow weary of the telling!"

Ladetta leaped high off the stone block, kick-twisted in mid air and did a three-quarter Sukihara onto a crumpled sedan trunk. She paused only momentarily to gather momentum to dive onto the smooth bed of a pickup hands first. Again, she launched herself, landing feet first on the other side of the street. She glided into the front of a blasted designer shop and disappeared from view.

I hoisted a mug of zap to my mouth philosophically. Ladetta would be in there for hours. Lanza stayed on the block, staring morosely after her.

Draining my zap, I yelled to him, "C'mon over here, Lanza and I'll getcha some zap!"

At first I didn't think he heard me. He was pretty spaced for Ladetta. But he finally turned my way and said, "Yeah, may as well, St. Eyves. Sure, thanks."



Illustrated by Dell Harris

He slid to the edge of the block and jumped down to the dusty sidewalk. Lanza strode unhappily over to the terrace fence and leaned on it for a time. When I got up and got three pitchers of zapper, (two for me, naturally) the fence had broken under Lanza's weight. He lay sprawled next to my table with about ten feet of fence under him. Didn't matter about the fence, everything is smashed to hell anyway since the Big Bust. Nobody really cares, since we're all too busy trying to stay phased into this reality frame. "This", being Earth that had devastated itself to hell so bad that we did a half slip out of our own little reality frame. But I'll get to that sob story in a minute.

I sat the pitchers of zap on the table and helped Lanza's gangly self up off the terrace deck and into his chair.

"You may be zappered already," I joked, "The way you totaled that fence."

"Accident. Always is," Lanza said defensively.

The boy was tense, morose, horny and lovesick. Mostly lovesick for now. He wouldn't get very horny till the next full moon. That's yet another sob story I'll save till later.

"Drink your zap. You can't take a joke yet."

"Don't matter how zappered I get," Lanza said, pouting.

He filled his tumbler and took a dainty little sip while I, of course, took a mighty gulp straight from the pitcher. Nothing dainty about me.

"Just isn't fair," Lanza groused, "Such a love I feel..."

"Oh get off it!" I snapped, wiping my mouth, "You're so full of that unrequited love shit that you just won't face the damn facts."

"Which are?" two more dainty sips.

"You know 'em as well as I do," another gulp from the pitcher.

"All I know is that she makes it with everybody else longer than she does with me," Lanza sniffed.

"Hey, you know how it is," I said, up-ending my pitcher again. "You know we're all too busy surviving and keeping our asses in this reality frame. You also know everybody in this tumbled down crapsink has got a subtle little frequency to hew to, or they get sucked into the reality that's waiting a couple of phases away. Do I have to go on? Kiddo, Ladetta has to keep dancing alone. She can't stay with anybody or else she'll phase out altogether. From what I hear, the neighboring reality frame makes Hell seem like a friendly little cookout."

"I realize all that," Lanza said, "It's just that I hate to share her with so many."

"Damn it, she's not yours to share!" I exclaimed, "She's nobody's and at the same time she's everybody's. You get her on full moons. For somebody else it's under different conditions. End of discussion. Drink up. I gotta go tend bar."

I stood and drained both my pitchers and turned to go inside. As I did so, I heard the tinkling of fairy bells on the broken street. I turned to look and saw Ladetta, clad only in solid bells gliding early from the designer shop and over the rusted hulks of ruined cars left by the Big Bust.

The Big Bust. Hah! That's the only way I can describe the madness that overtook four major super powers fifteen years ago with all their super-sophisticated horseshit and whatnot. Their Sunday-punch nukes removed the horrors of radiation and fallout. They substituted them for a cleaner mass destruction. Those assholes got started throwing them things around and couldn't stop. It must have been like eating peanuts for them. Well, the power of those bombs going off was so much that it ripped right through the fabric of reality itself. By the

time the push-button war was over, half the world's population was dead, and the other half found themselves *physically* unstable; cursed to either a hellish, nonsensical *other* reality or if they were lucky, able to stave off phasing out by various means. Everybody in ruined San Francisco had some way of dodging the *other* reality frame. Mine is imbibing massive amounts of alcoholic beverages and other more exotic intoxicants. And Ladetta danced. She danced to the music that our reality-phase frequency made as it fluctuated between our here and now and that *other* here and now. It was a music only she could hear. Sometimes she couldn't hear it and those times were the worst for her. Those were the times when she had to take a momentary lover.

So Ladetta danced. Oh, how she danced. She was poetry in motion, she was a goddess. Her sleek thighs and firm belly entranced everyone who watched her. Some more than others. Enter Arlanza. We found him in a stone culvert, abandoned by a party of scavengers. They had all been on the move when he fell sick with Waver fever. Nice guys.

Naturally, Lanza became infatuated with Ladetta's dancing ways. When he turned sixteen, she took him to introduce the pleasures to him. The only problem was that Lanza vibrated to his own little frequency which could not coincide with Ladetta's. But he quickly found out that during full moons his frequency vibrations changed ever so subtly. The first time he realized this, it was during the February moon cycle. He went running to Ladetta and begged her to take him. By a wonderful coincidence, Ladetta's music had stopped just as Lanza came running and yelling to her. I was tending bar at Grody's at the time and followed my customers out on the terrace to see what the commotion was about.

It was quite a sight to see. First there was Lanza outright *pleading* and begging her to take him. Then Ladetta giving in and wrapping him up in her cloak. The two of them disappeared into thin air. Twenty minutes later, Lanza flew out of that same air like an awkward Superman. He landed in the ruined street, and when he got to his feet, I could see his eyes fairly shining with exquisite bliss.

From then on he pursued her on every full moon. But naturally, her frequency would be in phase and she had to keep dancing. Either that, or she'd taken someone else and Lanza would be too late. You could count on two hands the times Ladetta and Lanza had been together. They coincided rarely, it seemed, Lanza's full moons and Ladetta's frequency fade-outs.

Like I said it was a real sob story. Ladetta wasn't suffering, but Lanza was. I just wished he'd suffer in silence like the rest of us and kick back and enjoy the aesthetics of Ladetta's dance.

As I went to work at Grody's I glanced back and saw her tripleflip onto an old theatre marquee. She did several reverse kips and ended the sequence in a fast spin. Lanza just sat there watching, tears forming in the corners of his eyes. Damn crybaby.

GRODY'S CLIENTELE aren't much to look at, but they keep us in business. Grody, Sharpy and I don't complain because even if it were just the three of us we'd still be in there guzzling the zap, honker, biero, extracts and other substances the boosters happen to lay on us. 'Cause that's the kind of phasers we are. It's a drag, because what used to get people wasted, zoomed and totally

fucked up, now only serves to keep us attached to this reality frame. A hell of a note. We still get blasted, but only after consuming enough shit to mindwipe entire armies. Those are the times we (meaning seventy percent of us) can be with Ladetta. Mine is a sob story too. A real humdinger.

Anyway, in addition to the usual assortment of slobs in there today was this outrageously muscular fellow. I swear, he had muscles on his muscles. His entire body rippled with thick corded muscles. His calves were a study in hard flowing muscular rhythm as was every inch of his legs. When he moved, it was with the grace of a cat. I was really impressed, and I was sure Ladetta would be, too. He was a real anomaly from the rest of the regulars. Avoiding Phase out takes its toll. So how did he maintain his looks and build and still not phase out? I made a note to myself to ask him later on. Right now though, I had to take over from Grody.

It was no big chore. Just had to confirm the barter and the cash (sure, we still used money, though only gold, silver, and other precious metals and jewels). Then we confirmed the inventory and certified the quality. We don't want anybody phasing out because of shitty zap or whatever.

When that was done, Grody took me aside and said, "I want you to talk to Ladetta."

"Why me and what about?"

"She's teasin' again, St. Eyves," Grody growled, "She went into Affaro's joint and did a belly dance routine that really heated the place up. And if that wasn't enough, she rubbed up Affaro's kid. And he ain't old enough to have a frequency. I don't want out people causin' hard feelin's. We all gotta depend on each other y'know."

"You didn't answer my first question," I said, "Why me?"

"You know her better than anybody else," said Grody, "And she knows you."

"Oh, great," I groaned, "I got mind-wiped once on psilocybin extract and made it with her all night. Now I gotta be her keeper."

"Right," Grody said relentlessly, "I don't want her causin' trouble in the community. I'll make it worth your while."

My ears perked up at that. This sounded interesting.

"In what way?" I asked hopefully.

"I've got an extra canister of psilocybin in the storeroom. A twenty-gallon canister. Never been cracked."

"Jesus!" I breathed, "You got a deal!"

"I knew I could talk you into it," Grody grinned, untying his apron, "Well, I gotta get movin'. There's a hovel of doxies foamin' at the mouth for my body. I gotta get there before they phase out."

"Have fun," I said, downing a pitcher of biero, "Don't worry about a thing, Grody, I got it under control."

"That's what I like to hear," Grody said, walking out from behind the bar.

Grody did have a point. If any woman was ever more aware of her sensuousness it was Ladetta. You might say she was intensely aware of it. And yeah, I had talked to her before about teasing. Loud and long I had talked to her. The gist of it was hey, woman, if you're gonna share the damn beast, great. If not, then leave the poor bastards alone. After all, they've got all they can handle keeping their bodies stable. They don't need their blood unbalanced by unful-

filled hormones. Sure she had said, I'll quit it. Then danced off into a fallen skyscraper. Big deal, right?

Big Mersey's bellow for more zap snapped me out of my daydream.

"Comin' up, Mers," I said, stepping to the keg with a mug.

"Make it a tall pitcher, St. Eyves," Big Mersey said, bringing two scrawny plucked chickens out of his gunny sack.

I reached for a tall one and filled it up with the thick viscous brew. The fumes wafted up my nostrils, which I inhaled gratefully.

I set the tall pitcher down and threw the chickens in the cooler. Turning to the musclebound guy I asked, "Refill?"

"Yeah," the guy said, digging in a pouch, "Better make it pitchers this time, barkeep. My frequency is starting to fluctuate again. Damn."

I set the pitchers in front of him and picked the five silver coins he threw on the bar. Pure silver coins three inches in diameter with a crowned head impressed on it. I gave it the old teeth test. Hard as a rock. I was impressed.

"We don't get many of these around here," I told him, "Who's the crowned head?"

The guy shrugged and said, "I was part of a commune up Chico way a few months back. Had everything organized to the point of coining money. The dude on the coin was the head honcho of the place. They grew the best crop of outrageous sensoid smoke in that part of Old California. But they got too organized for my taste. You know how it is.

Yeah, I know how it is. Since the Big Bust, nothing is worth staying with for long. Drifting around is all right if your frequency is stable enough. If not, well, you better be packin' some dynamite shit. Otherwise you'll phase out in the middle of nowhere. Then you'll *really* be nowhere. And nowhen.

"Is that where you got into condition, raisin' smoke? I asked.

"Not really," he said, "I got into shape way before when Everything Went to The Pits. I was in the ballet. I loved to dance. Still do. Have to now, to keep my frequency in line."

"That's a coincidence," I said, "We have a Dancer, too. Her name's Ladetta. You've seen her, more than likely, haven't you?"

"Yeah, I saw her dancing on what's left of the Golden Gate. She does sloppy kips. Great body, but lousy kips."

Speak of the Devil. Ladetta came sailing in from the terrace and landed on one of our shattered glass daisies. She executed a series of high kicks before leaping hands first on the floor. Her dress of bells jangled as it fell over her face, revealing the fact that she wore nothing underneath.

Great view. Just the very thing Grody wanted me to talk to her about. So I figured I would, that canister of psilocybin in the storeroom weighing heavily on my mind.

"Knock it off, Ladetta!" I yelled, "Get some underwear on, for God's sake!"

Startled, she flexed her arms and flew up onto a pool table feet first, interrupting a game in progress. She stood, hands on hips and pouting at me.

"What's the matter, St. Eyves?" she sneered, "Can't you handle it?"

"That's not the point," I shot back, "It's bad for morale, not to mention business."

"Oh, I don't know..." Muscles said..

There, I spoke to her. To hell with Grody. I went to the storeroom for that psilocybin I had just earned. When I came back, Ladetta was leaping from table to table just as Lanza bellied up to the bar at the far end.

Not tonight, I groaned to myself, Don't do the puppy dog routine with the big adorable eyes. Not tonight. Not when I'm about to get mindwiped tending bar. Not when Muscles has got the hots for Ladetta.

But shit, that boy will never learn. Kid must be a damn masochist. Sure he was. He sat there, following her every lithe movement, worshipping her with his eyes.

Muscles followed her movements too, with a critical, disapproving eye. Finally, he turned back around snorting, "I've never seen such a travesty in my life!"

Ladetta heard him and leaped from the splintered bandstand to the bar in front of him.

"I'm Ladetta," she snarled, "What are you saying about my routines behind my back?"

She did the splits right there in front of him and leaned close to his face. Somewhere off in the periphery, I saw Lanza clench his teeth. Lotta good that was gonna do him.

For a moment, neither of them spoke. Muscles smiled evenly at her, not tempted by her closeness. He had remarkable self control. Anybody else would have gone for it. Including me. But only if I was mindwiped.

His eyes roamed over her body for several seconds, taking in her generous breasts, the curve of her throat, the swatches of skin showing through the bells.

"Well," she breathed, flicking her tongue at him, "What about my dance?"

"You're terrible," he breathed back, "Your kips are the Pits, your pirouettes stink, and your pas de deux are an abomination to mankind."

"I don't give a shit about all that," she laughed in his face, "It's survival. I'm damn good at it."

"And as a lover?" he asked brazenly, edging closer.

"The best," she said, brushing her lips against his.

To everybody's surprise, including my own, they were completely physically phased. Lanza slammed his tumbler on the bar in frustration. I went to him with a pitcher of honker just so he wouldn't start blubbering. Putting his pitcher down, I whispered to him, "Don't even start, Lanza. I'll throw you out the damn door if you do. Just sit here, get wasted and keep your mouth shut. I'm not in the mood for your water works tonight. Got me?"

Lanza opened his mouth to speak, thought better of it and tossed down some honker instead.

"Thatta boy," I said, patting his shoulder, "You'll make it."

When the place started filling up, I chased Ladetta off the bar. She scissored over Muscle's head and carwheeled across the floor. She pony-walked back and said, "Who are you? And just what makes you such an expert anyway?"

"They call me Kadlak," he said, sliding off his stool, "And I'll show you what makes me an expert."

And he sure did. He peeled off his shirt and flexed his muscles for everyone's benefit. Except Lanza, whose eyes glinted with his boyish jealousy.

Kadlak pranced over to Ladetta and swooped her up in his arms. They twirled around for awhile and made it out onto the terrace. We followed them

out there and watched as they glided over the terrace fence.

They danced among the wrecked and abandoned cars as if they'd known each other for years. Ladetta flipped onto the roof of a semi and did a swan dive into Kadlak's arms. Kadlak executed a bunch of pirouettes, going from rusted out traffic to cracked and crumpled sidewalk. He dipped her low to the cement and she curled out of his arms to cartwheel across the street. Kadlak joined her inside the dim lobby. As we watched, they spun together as one. They blended into the gloom and finally disappeared into nothingness.

"That's all for today, people," I said, turning toward the bar, "Back inside before you start phasing out."

Only Lanza had stayed behind in his place at the bar. He was nursing two pitchers of honker. Must have got 'em himself, because I didn't set 'em up for him.

"He's fucking her now, isn't he?" Lanza asked bitterly.

"In a word, yes," I replied, putting dirty glasses and pitchers in the sink.

"She's a real whore," Lanza said, taking a man sized gulp from one of his pitchers.

"Not really," I said, "She's surviving the best way she knows how. But don't envy Kadlak."

"Why not?" Lanza said, gnashing his teeth.

He was silent a moment then said, "She is a fucking whore, St. Eyves!"

"Why is she a whore, Lanza?" I asked, "Just because he can match her frequency and you can't? Sounds like you're just a jealous young pup."

That took some wind out of him. He shut up and concentrated on getting loaded. It was a relief for me as I could concentrate on keeping everybody else happy and phased in. Grody's regulars get rowdy when they're unhappy or about to phase out.

Actually, I expected Ladetta and Kadlak to finish in a few hours and come back in for drinks. But they didn't. They didn't come back for the rest of that day, or either the next day.

As a matter of fact, they were gone for five days. Then Kadlak came back first, diving out of thin air on the terrace. He smashed through a table and the fence before flopping down the steps like a ragdoll.

He was, of course, quite dead, and very, very old. I dragged Lanza to the corpse and forced him to look at it.

Kadlak's rusty blonde hair was now pure white. His face was nearly unrecognizable through the myriad wrinkles and age lines. He was toothless to boot. Nothing remained of his he-man muscles. They were shrunken and stringy now. His skin was parchment thin and in places was flaking away. And to boot, a faint nebulous odor issued from his corpse.

"What happened to him?" Lanza asked, looking sick.

"Isn't it obvious?" I snapped, "The places they phased into together don't conform to our laws of space and time, Lanza. It doesn't do anything to people like Ladetta because of their own personal frequency lines keep them aging normally. But Kadlak's kind, whose bodies operate on a negligible frequency line, are subject to those Crazy Places."

"But this hasn't happened to anybody else!" Lanza exclaimed, "Not even you! And you spent a whole night with her!"

"It happens, believe me, it happens," I said, looking down at the corpse, "I

was lucky I didn't spend any more real time with her than I did. And you're lucky too."

"You mean she just drained Kadlak dry and threw him away?" Lanza's voice dripped with horror. "Like a used wineskin?"

"That's right," I said, "And that's why I told you not to envy him. I had a hunch he'd end up like this."

Lanza stood over the corpse, his mouth agape.

"C'mon, help me get this thing out of here before it stinks the place up."

Lanza tremulously picked the corpse's legs up while I took its arms. We couldn't start for awhile because he was throwing his guts up on the street. We finally started off but had to stop every five damn feet for him to dry heave.

The crowd watching us from the terrace would have laughed at us, I'm sure, if the situation hadn't been so macabre. We took the corpse down the street a ways, turned into an alley and found a handy dumpster that was half full. We dumped Kadlak inside and slammed the lid on him.

Lanza leaned weakly against me saying, "Never again, St. Eyves, never again. That could have been me in there."

"It could have been any one of us, Lanza," I said, patting his shoulder.

Lanza didn't know it but I was pretty shook up myself. I was the one who up 'til now had spent the most time with her. Even I had never dreamed something this radical would happen.

In the past, we had all lusted after Ladetta, our own dancer in the ruins. We'd all had our times with her, brief though they may have been. And we all knew we aged more rapidly when we made love with her. That had never stopped any of us from coming back for seconds. But now, now deep inside myself I knew everything was irrevocably changed.

And it was. When Lanza and I got back to Grody's, Ladetta was back. But nobody was having anything to do with her now. They had all seen too clearly, the byproducts of her loving. I suspected that the doxy business would pick up in coming days.

But we all kept Ladetta at a distance from then on.

When Lanza and I got back, she was dancing around the crowd, trying to get someone to notice her. They did, but their revulsion kept them from acknowledging it. Their disgust was a palpable thing.

She went from person to person, wanting a smile, a greeting. But getting instead, scowls of dismissal and looks of dread. Ladetta saw Lanza and I and twirled up to us. Horror was in Lanza's eyes when he looked at her. I stared stonily away from her.

"Lanza!" she breathed, "I'm back! Kadlak was good but I missed you. The full moon is due in a few days and...What's wrong, Lanza? What the hell is wrong with all of you!"

"You sucked him dry!" Lanza screamed at her, "You drank his juice, ate his meat and threw him on the trash heap! How much time have you stolen from the rest of us? How much Ladetta!"

She withered under his tirade.

"You're worse than a damn whore! You're a victimizing monster!"

She turned to me and grabbed my shoulder, saying, "He doesn't understand. Make him understand, St. Eyves!"

"There's nothing to understand!" I snarled, throwing her on the terrace deck

away from me, "You are unclean."

Lanza and I joined the crowd walking into the bar.

"You're all fools!" she ranted at us, "This is survival! We all have to!"

She ran to Lanza and grabbed his waist.

"Please, Lanza!"

"Get out of my life!" he shouted, planting a fist on her chin.

She fell against a table and began crying.

"None of you know!" she sobbed, "None of you! You don't know what it's like to have to ration out time for love! Ten minutes here, thirty there! I wanted more time! Damn you all, I love you! I wouldn't hurt any of you! Please! You've got to listen to me!"

Lanza shut the outside doors against her pleadings. She hammered on the glass pane for several long minutes before at last giving up.

At the bar, I clapped Lanza on the shoulder and said, "Sonny, I think you grew up."

I poured him a big pitcher of honker and we all got creamed long into the night.

Word gets around in broken-down, flamed-out old San Francisco. Ladetta went into Affaro's one time. They gave her food and drink, then threw her out. Several other places got the word and chased her away.

She's a tragic figure now, our dancer in the ruins. Reduced to scavenging and foraging for her daily bread. But she stays out in the ruins, dancing among the destroyed edifices.

Every now and then we'll see her twirling and bobbing among the tumbled down columns. Twisting among the rest of the shambled dreams. Whenever we do see her, she looks much older every time.

When Lanza spots her now, a hard glint shows in his eyes and he drinks a little harder. He won't admit it, but she still has a hold on him.

And me? Well, just keep the psilocybin flowing and I'll die a happy man.

Afterword to "Dancer in the Ruins"

How to describe the euphoric effect of a FIRST SALE? Ah, yes. It's a hell of a natural high, roughly equivalent to chain-smoking ten joints of "maui-wowie", but I highly recommend the former.

Well, here I am, sf community, you lucky devils! The hottest thing since Mt. St. Helens. It took me a year of rejections to be able to say that. So, who am I?

At the tender age of nine I read my first science fiction: A story called "Rocket Ship Galileo" by Heinlein. The following week I wrote my own little thing. Lost in antiquity, alas. The next twenty years or so were spent writing for my own titillation. Last year I ran out of easy

cliches, and the rest is history.

Oh yeah. In conclusion: sf—NOT sci-fi!
Tom Cummins



OVA HAMLET

two sort-of Adventurers

Flayshig and the Goyish Meshugge were sitting at a crude formica table in Silver's Deli on Fleegle Street, the foulest and most ill-reputed thoroughfare in Hotzeplotz. Flayshig, an immensely fat pattern-cutter whose origin in remote Gaulizia was spoken of only in subdued whispers (or behind closed doors) was holding a corned-beef-on rye in one huge, fleshy hand, and a bottle of celery tonic in the other.

He leaned forward, his massive body almost hiding the table, and spoke to his companion. "You know, Meshugge, this is an awfully boring night. I could really use some excitement. An adventure of some sort. An encounter with a band of cutpurses or wizards, or a meeting with a couple of cozy girls mayhap. It's been a while since we were invited to tarry with Fryx and Frex that time in Schnipposhok."

"And lucky we were to escape with whole hides!" replied his companion, an incredibly thin and sharp-featured man dressed all in purple, orange, blue, green, red, vermilion, turquoise, chartreuse and a very few other colors. "Why, I had to leave my toad-sticker behind when we scooted out through the window. And there we were, forgetting that Fryx and Frex's cozy chamber was in the top of an old battlement."

"Yes," Flayshig commented. "It must have been our two patron spirits, Kvetcherkeh of the Loud Complaints and Nayfish of the Cowardly Manner, who saved us!"

"More likely it was the handy placement of Fryx and Frex's daddy's hog-wallow. It made for a soft, albeit a smelly, landing place."

"But don't you think it was our foresightful familiars who saw to it that we chose two girls whose daddy raised pigs for a living, instead of, say, the daughters of an iron monger? What if we'd tumbled into a forge instead of that nice, easy muck?"

"You may be right," the Meshugge conceded, although not with the sound of total conviction in his voice. "But here I am sitting in Silver's Deli, noshing on gefilte fish and Maneshewitz wine, with nothing to look forward to afterwards except a cold pallet and the awesome sounds of you snoring away on its companion."

Flayshig downed the last of his sandwich and smothered a belch as grand as his wobbly belly.

The Meshugge left half his gefilte fish behind, finished off his wine and fastidiously wiped his chin with a corner of his companion's billowing shmatte. "I don't like the looks of dark Fleegle Street," he rapped out. "I'll self-sacrificingly venture outside and make sure that the coast is clear, while you settle up our account with Silver over there." He jerked a pointed thumb at the be-apronned deli-keeper glaring suspiciously at them from behind the potato salad and cole slaw.

Scant moments later Flayshig joined the Meshugge outside in the street. The world of Nuvhen's moon shone balefully through demon-haunted (or perhaps merely storm-driven) clouds, giving Nuvhen the appearance of a watery ghost of itself. "You owe me for your share of the tab," the heavy-set Gaulizianer demanded of his friend.

"Not so," Meshugge snapped in reply. "Didn't I leave the deli first and scout out Fleegle Street at the risk of life and limb? Surely those services are worth at least as much as a plate of noshes. If anything, 'tis you who owe me a small token of gratitude. But I'm ever willing to let ride the debt, in view of our ancient friendship and the many scrapes we've been through together. But at least some expression of gratitude would be welcome!"

Flayshig shrugged. "I suppose you're right, Meshugge. But somehow it seems that I always get stuck with paying our bills, while you get the first pick of loot, fruit, and playmates."

"Yes, and charge you not a krupnik for all the extra work I do in tasting and sampling various wares to make sure that you get nothing less than you deserve, Flayshig. You ought to send thanks up (or perhaps some other direction would be more appropriate) for the day that Kvetcherkeh and Nayfish conspired to make us companions in our journey through life and Hotzeplotz."

The twain of them rounded the corner of Goniff's Alley, and their conversation was brought to an abrupt halt at the sight of two ladies leaning languorously against a municipal cresset-holder.

"Surely Nayfish of the Cowardly Manner heard our deli dialog," the Goyish Meshugge hissed beneath his fishy breath.

"Aye, and Kvetcherkeh of the Loud Complaints sent us upon the path we've taken, or we'd never have come upon the two morsels of delight yonder!" Flayshig let go a loud krechitz. Pardon. I shouldn't have had so much celery tonic."

"Hello, there, you two swells," one of the cresset-dumplings cooed.

Flayshig peered through the murky atmosphere of Goniff's Alley in a vain attempt to ascertain which of the charmers had spoken. The two were an oddly like and yet oddly unlike pair. One was all bosom and hips, curled red tresses and curved red lips, and great round eyes that flashed a russet hue in the flickering cresset-flame. The other was slim and willowy, as thin-fleshed as her companion was generously endowed, and her coloring was the complete

opposite of her sister-of-the-night, with pale skin, nearly sallow in the darkness of the alley. Her eyes shone with a tint like that of the Bay of Brunx beneath a wind-whipped autumn tempest and her black locks hung in straight, glossy strands that seemed to catch a greenish glare from the oil-flame above.

"Wow!" the corpulent Gaulizian exclaimed, "I never saw any pair of ladies to compare with these two! How about you, Meshugge? You ever see the likes?"

"A few times," the Goyish Meshugge provided. "Once when an officer of the city watch foolishly mistook me for an infamous second-story man who'd been trying to prevent revolution in Schnipposhok, and offered me free lodging at the courtesy of the Schnipposhok municipality."

"Oh, you mean the time you got thrown in the clink over t' Schnip for lifting ladies' jewels out of their bedrooms in the middle of the night. I remember, I had to bribe the chief gaoler of Schnip to get you out of that one, Meshugge. It took all of my savings, and then when we got home you loaned me money to live on until I could earn some more. And you charged me interest."

"Less than the going rate among the temple usurers, Flayshig. Although in fact 'tis I who should receive your gratitude and mayhap some more tangible token thereof, for that little escapade. Why, the whores in the Schnipposhok lockup were clamouring to provide for my needs and comforts. I could have raffled myself off and turned a handsome profit for a mere few days of not unpleasant work. But I permitted you to bribe me out of there because I knew you'd just get into trouble without me around.

"Still and all, Flayshig, still and all...." The Meshugge's eyes grew distant with recollection. "'Twas the high priests of Shubbo-Nyarlapah who pressured the municipality into trying to clear up the streetwalker situation so's to eliminate competition for their own temple whores, as were responsible for there being any such comfort in the municipal pokey."

All during this exchange, the two lissome individuals whose presence inspired the conversation had not been unmoving. The ruddy and generously-formed one had made two circles about the Meshugge and his fleshy friend Flayshig, moving clockwise, while the darker and somewhat sharp-boned sister had done similarly, only widdershins. It was as if these two were such opposites of one another that anything either did, the other had to do backwards, or in some other manner to offset the effort of the first.

"Uhh, do you two ladies think you might like some, ahh, company of an evening?" Flayshig asked, his goggling eyes and pumpkin-shaped head seeming to revolve from right to left, or mayhap it were from left to right, as he kept the green sister in sight.

"We've a marvelous set of chambers on the Street of Shmegegges. A desert-bearskin rug with fur thick as swamp-grass, a fireplace to warm one's bones on a night of chill and damp, a full wineskin bulging with rich sweet squeezings of the lushest vines," the Meshugge took up.

The rounder of the two cupcakes-of-the-evening ceased her clockwise sashaying and pressed her ample endowments against the Goyish Meshugge. "Hmm," she commented appraisingly, "a trifle on the scrawny side, but not without a certain potential. I'd like to see the cut of his purse, sister."

The slimmer of the maidens (or, at least, they must once have been maidens) dispensed with her widdershinning and poked a bony elbow into the pendulous belly of Flayshig. "Methinks that skeletal lizard you're pressing against would

make a fair cauldron of stew, if you'd first crack his bones to let the marrow out. For there's surely not enough meat on his bones to make a proper meal for a cub.

"But this nice bubee, *ahah!*" She patted big Flayshig on his belly, holding one slim hand on either side of his rounded tum-tum and slapping it alternately to the left and right until it jiggled. "This one, sister, could feed a platoon of the likes of thee and me."

Now Flayshig, while not noticeably a tall man because of his generally rounded configuration, was actually as high as a Greenpointnik stallion or the door-lintel at Silver's Deli (where, in fact, Silver had finally installed a kind of bumping-pad, not to protect Flayshig who should have known better but kept bumping his noggin anyway, but to keep the wood from being damaged by the repeated collisions). And the Goyish Meshugge, more than a trifle vain about his appearance, tended to go in for tall-heeled boots that gave him the appearance of a stature greater than that provided by the gods of Nuhven.

The two swaggerers were thus able to peer over the heads of their winsome companions, and exchanged a worldly-wise wink.

They made their way together through dank alleyways and echoing courtyards where all of the spirits of Nuvhen seemed to gather in the shadows and peer at the quartet with eyes like luminous fungus, or maybe burglars' bulls'eye lanterns, for Flayshig and the Meshugge were by no means the only thieves in Hotzeplotz. When they reached the dwelling-place in the Street of Shmeggegges where the rotund Gaulitzianer and the diminutive Goyisher shared digs, the two men drew their newfound friends into an alcove and a whispered conversation ensued.

"What's the trouble, swittniks?" the ruddy wench inquired.

And, "This don't look like such a palace to me," the greenish woman said.

The Meshugge hissed for silence. "We'll have to sneak up the back way," he whispered. "Flayshig and I don't want the lendlady should see us."

"And why not?" the rounded wench inquired, leaning back from the Meshugge, who had drawn a conservative cloak of tangerine, peach, mauve, buff, beige and turquoise over his more colorful buskin to keep the night air out.

"Why not? Why not?" Flayshig put in. "We're not behind on the rent again, are we, Meshugge?"

"Oh, no," the Goyisher replied.

Because I remember, you told me that you had only a gold fardl and the lendlady couldn't make change from it, so I had to give you money for my half of the rent and yours, too. You paid the lendlady, no?"

"Well," the Goyish Meshugge explained, "in fact, I was going to, but I met a fellow who'd just come off a sailing caravel from Pinsk—"

"From Pinsk?" the Gaulizianer echoed.

"Well, or maybe it was Minsk."

"An-hah!"

"And he had some smuggled gems with him that were worth a fortune, Flayshig old friend. For just a fardl and two grupniks, he was willing to sell me—"

"Oh, no!" Flayshig exclaimed. "You spent our money on cut-glass, Meshugge? Is that what you're telling me? And now the lendlady will want her rent...."

The Meshugge pressed a long finger to his thin lips. "Shhh! Just keep quiet on the way in and she'll never see us."

Astonishingly, they succeeded in getting up to the adventurers' loft unchallenged. After all, the landlady was a deep sleeper, or maybe she was just feeling soft-hearted for a change. Hoo-hah!

At the boys' place, the dark-haired, willowy-torsoed wench detached herself the giant Flayshig and stood in the middle of the much-advertised desert-bearskin rug. "This is the luxurious rug you wanted us to lie on?" she inquired. "Such a rug, no wonder the bear wanted to get rid of it. Feh!"

The red-haired, generously-rounded miss stepped away from the Goyish Meshugge who had doffed his cloak and buskin to stand in a simple shmatte that showed only a few stains and rips here and there. "Well," the girlie said, "so how's about that marvey wine you were talking about?"

"It's right in the corner," Flayshig interjected. "Here." He made his way to the shadowiest part of the room, ignoring the terrifying scraping and scuttling sounds made by the spirits who hid there in the dark (or maybe the noises came from rats or cockroaches), and returned with a greasy old wineskin. He pulled the stopper from its neck and upended the skin above his gaping mouth but all that came out were a few drops of bitter dregs.

"Meshugge!" the Gaulizianer barbarian complained.

Even the darkness of the midnight chamber couldn't hide the embarrassed blush that reddened the cheeks of the Goyisher. "I just had a teeny sip, Flayshig," he wined. "Or maybe two teeny sips, I don't exactly remember. You know how it is when you get tipsy. Heh-heh."

The two girlies had withdrawn to another corner of the room and were conversing sibilantly, or perhaps gutterally. From time to time one or the other of them would cast a scornful glance at the two adventurers, then make a guttural, or perhaps sibilant, comment to her companion.

Finally they returned to the desert-bearskin rug and pulled their dresskeles over their heads, tossing them into the corner of the room. "Come on fellas," they murmured in unison.

The philosophers of Nuvhen have been discussing for thousands of years the exact nature of the sun that rises over the Bay of Brunx and sets behind the Hills of Hoybinkyn every morning and every night. There are some who hold that the sun is a child's ball thrown across the dome of heaven by a playful tyke who lives somewhere in a land beneath the Bay of Brunx, to a companion who lives far past the Hills of Hoybinkyn. The companion then rolls the ball back through a secret tunnel dug deep beneath the land of Nuvhen, for otherwise (the philosophers point out) the sun would alternately rise in the Brunx and set in Hoybinkyn, and rise in Hoybinkyn and set in the Brunx, which clearly it does not.

Still, there are others who consider this explanation of the nature of the sun and its diurnal path across Nuvhen's sky as a bit of naive casuistry, and prefer a simpler theory, such as that of the supernal dialectical anthesis, or perhaps the aspirated partifragmentated calamari.

All of this is as it may be, for in due course the sun *did* rise over the Bay of Brunx and cast its rays through the high, grimy windows of the dusty loft on the Street of Shmegges.

The Goyish Meshugge sat up in the middle of the desert-bearskin rug, stretched and yawned luxuriantly, and reached for the warm curves of his

companion of the previous night. He was thinking of a little morning's refresher, or maybe of trying to hit her up for a little loan.

Instead of delectably curvy flesh, his bony digits found only the mangy fur of a once noble desert bear.

The Meshugge leaped to his feet and glared around the room, looking for the two girlies of the night and/or his chubby Gaulitzianer companion. There was no one to be seen!

A yellow ray of sunlight coming all the way from the glowing orange ball over the Bay of Brunx managed to struggle through the grimy window of the loft over the Street of Shmegegges and pierce the dusty air of the room. It illuminated the oaken door where the Goyish Meshugge's auburn, maroon, burnt sienna, gray, black, xanthic and ultramarine hat hung from its peg. The Meshugge lifted the hat and found a message stuck in its greasy leather band. The Meshugge squatted crosslegged and painstakingly traced out the message.

The writing was large and crude and hard to make out.

The Goyish Meshugge moved his lips and whispered as he read.

DERE GOYISHER—the message ran—ME & TEH GIRLEIS HAS GIVVEN UPP ON YUO & WE AR GOWING AWUAY TO MINSK—or maybe, for the penmanship assuredly left a great deal to be desired, it said PINSK—& FINED US THUOSE GEMMS. DONET TRIY & FOWLOW US ORR IL'L CRAKC YUOR HEDD WEYED OPUN!!!

LUVE,
FLAYSHIG

The Lost-and-Found Ova Hamlet by Richard A. Lupoff

To be a little more serious than usual when talking about Ova Hamlet....

It seems to me that may one write parody with two possible attitudes toward the object of the parody. If one enjoyed the original work and admires its creator, the parody becomes a kind of good-natured jibe, even an *homage*. If, on the other hand, the parodist disliked the original work and regards its creator with anger or despite, the parody can come out as a thoroughly vicious attack.

Some of the Ova Hamlet parodies (a majority of them, in fact) have been of the first type. A few have been of the second. I will leave it for the reader to leaf through his or her back issues of *Amazing* and *Fantastic*—better yet, through the pages of *The Ova Hamlet Papers*—and decide which stories are *homage*, which are attack.

Regarding "Two Sort-of Adventurers" (the title harks to "Two Sought Adventure") there should be no such question. Fritz Leiber has been variously

entertaining, scaring, stimulating, and enlightening us with his science fiction and fantasy for more than forty years. His tales of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser rank among the most long-running and most beloved series in all the history of fantasy. A parody of them can be nothing other than a gesture of loving admiration for the originals, and even more for their creator.

"Two Sort-of Adventurers" was written in 1978 and delivered to Ted White, then editor of this magazine. The manuscript was in inventory when the administration changed, and in the move of editorial offices, it was lost in the shuffle!

Fortunately, it's my own habit to keep copies of all Ova Hamlet's manuscripts on file. The old dear is a trifle disorganized, and things do get lost, so it's wise to keep a back-up copy of everything.

Thus, thanks to a friendly nudge from Ted White himself, and to the cheerful cooperation of Elinor Mavor, and with a grateful nod toward the clever person who invented the xerox machine (there isn't actually a Mr. Xerox, do you think?) we are able to rescue this "lost" Ova Hamlet story, "Two Sort-of Adventurers."

Stephen Goldin Grant Carrington One Step at a Time

This is the night that separates Mankind from its history of ceaseless warfare. The transition to the Golden Age is not heralded by a fanfare of celestial trumpets; it slips across the threshold on cat's feet, silent and unexpected. True, headlines are screaming from every newspaper, and TV commentators are speaking in a hopeful hush about this historic event: the Geneva convocation of the world's heads of state in order to rubber-stamp the Treaty that has already been approved by all the Congresses, Parliaments and Presidia. But no one believes it.

Oh, they all hope. The world is weary and frightened of war—too frightened to stop and too weary to think of a new way to do things. There have been too many false hopes, too many treaties shattered, too many promises broken. "Peace" has become a word like "Santa Claus"; you say it for the sake of the children, but you can no longer believe in it yourself.

And so, on this special night, business continues as usual. It is nearing ten p.m. Crowds jostle in the motion picture and theatre district of the city, leaving the early show or entering the late show, or just milling about aimlessly. Front doors are being locked; the cat and the milk bottles have been put out. Stores have all shut down. The world gives itself up to true darkness one last time.

"You're too little, Ray. Go play with kids your own size." The big kid shoved the little one aside.

The smaller boy moved with the push, but refused to leave. Instead, he looked over to Frank, the leader of the older boys. "I wanta play with you," he said determinedly. "Let me play."

Frank glared back at little Ray, meeting the younger boy's implacable stare. He was all set to send the kid away, but changed his mind for some reason. "Okay, you can play with us," he growled.

"Hey, what's wrong with you, Frank? We don't want that little baby along."

"Oh, don't worry, Bobby. Ray can be on my team if you don't want him. You can be defensive back, Ray. You tackle anyone who gets through, okay? Think you can handle it?"

Ray was quiet for a moment. "Sure," he said at last.

When they were lined up, Frank positioned Ray far behind the line. Ray didn't seem to mind the exile. He stood there, staring intently and unnerving

the other team. And whenever they broke loose and a play worked the way it was supposed to, Ray always seemed to know what would happen and was there, ready to tackle the runner. Though he was too small to stop him single-handed, Ray could usually slow him down long enough for the rest of the defense to catch up.

On offense, the little kid was almost untouchable. He wasn't too fast or strong, and could be caught from behind, but direct tacklers seemed to hesitate long enough for him to sidestep them.

Bobby's team scored only two touchdowns. Frank's team scored ten.

One man walks alone through the streets of the city. His hands are shoved deep within his pockets. He walks with the calm assurance of one who knows that no danger will befall him. Not tonight or any night.

He doesn't want to listen to the newscasters. He doesn't need to. He has practically written the Peace Treaty single-handedly, the treaty that will finally bring real peace to the world. It is an accomplishment that many men would have—and had—died to achieve. Ray Timmins is bored.

There is a crashing of garbage cans in an alley to his right. Without fear, he turns toward the sound.

"Ray Timmins," the teacher snapped.

Ray looked up from his doodling. "Uh, yes, ma'am?"

"Have you been paying attention?"

"Of course."

"Then answer the question, please."

The rest of the class giggled. This time Ray Timmins, the wiseguy who knew all the answers, had been caught goofing off. Now he'd get what was due him. Most of Ray's classmates resented him, though none could have said why. He wasn't the teacher's pet, even if he was the top student in the class. In fact, his teachers disliked him as much as the students.

Ray stared at the teacher's face for a moment, then said slowly, "Uh, the area of a circle is πr^2 ."

"That's right," the teacher said, miffed. She'd been sure the Timmins boy had been goofing off again. Frustrated, she turned to another victim and continued the inquisition.

Not bothering to stifle a yawn, Ray Timmins went back to his doodling.

A grey cat has tried and failed to take the lid off a garbage can; in the process, it has knocked over a smaller, empty can next to it. Ray Timmins moves into the alley. The cat, caught between the hunger-inducing smells from the garbage can and a desire to run from the approaching stranger, remains almost paralyzed, staring fearfully at the advancing form.

Ray lifts the lid of the garbage can, then steps back. The cat watches him warily, suspicious of this sudden favor from a human being. Finally, while Ray waits with a quiet smile, it leaps to the top of the can and starts rummaging around for something edible, stopping frequently to look over its shoulder at its benefactor.

Ray leans back against the wall and watches thoughtfully. The cat stops, startled by the sudden movement. "I suppose that makes you happy," Ray said to the animal. "An open garbage pail must look pretty good to a starving cat. But what if your life were nothing but an endless string of open garbage pails?"

What then, cat?"

The cat's ears, which had picked up when Ray started talking, return to their normal position and the animal resumes its rummaging.

"Do you share with the other cats?" Ray continues. "And what if there's still some left? What do you do with your embarrassment of riches?"

The cat ignores his questions and picks hungrily at a half-eaten fish skeleton. Ray Timmins sighs and walks out of the alley. The cat watches him leave, wary and confused.

"Here he comes," Aaron said to his friend Sam.

"I wonder what they all see in him," Sam replied. "He's an ugly son of a bitch. Doesn't he ever wash his face?"

The object of their discussion came closer: tall, thin, pimply-faced freshman Ray Timmins. Aaron and Sam stepped in front of him, blocking his way. "I want to talk to you," Aaron said.

"What about?" Despite the belligerent air of the other two, Timmins' voice was calm and even.

"Tanya."

"What's there to talk about? We've broken up. That's all there is."

"Tanya's my sister."

"So?"

"You little bastard, don't you know she's pregnant?"

Ray was unruffled. "That's her problem. She's over twenty-one. If she doesn't want an abortion and doesn't file a paternity suit, it's no skin off my nose. I don't care what happens to her."

Aaron grabbed the smaller man and shook his fist under Ray's nose. "You know what I'm going to do to you, punk?"

Ray met his glaring eyes without emotion or worry. For a moment, the tableau was frozen and they stared at each other: Aaron enraged and threatening, Ray calm and unconcerned. At last, Aaron dropped his fist slowly to his side, and he was trembling. He wiped his hand on his trouser leg as though it had touched something filthy. "You disgust me, Timmins, you know that? C'mon Sam, let's get out of here."

Sam was confused. "But I thought you wanted to...."

"Let's go Sam. I'm not gonna waste my time beating up a creep like that. He makes me sick."

Ray watched his two would-be attackers walk away. He started to smile slightly, but there was no mirth in it. Then he continued on to his next class.

The night presses in on Ray from all sides, like a black glove squeezing the juices from his body. The darkness without reflects the darkness within.

Loneliness, he thinks. Everyone thinks he's lonely, but none of them really knows what loneliness is. Never in the history of the world has anyone ever been as completely alone as I am. There's no one to talk to, no one to love...or even hate. There's just me and a world full of deaf and blind morons. I can give them anything they want—peace, war, death, life— but who is going to give me anything?

The weight of the world is on one man's shoulders, a man who is no Atlas, and no one knows it but him. Loneliness is a tangible thing to him, like the burnished copper on the tongue, like the color of night at the corners of his eyes on

the brightest of days. Like a black cloud engulfing his soul.

Ray notices, without surprise, that he is walking towards the river again.

The State Department interviewer looked over the young man's file one more time. Brilliant academic record, speaks seven languages fluently, student-body vice president, All Conference defensive halfback, about to graduate in June with a Bachelor's degree in Linguistics at age 20. On the personal side, there was a notation that he was known for his many brief love affairs—a ladies' man, but seemingly incapable of forming deep attachments. No close friends—a loner. Well, that wasn't necessarily a drawback. In fact, in the Foreign Service that might be an advantage, providing he didn't get into too much trouble with the women in foreign countries.

But that untroubled gaze of his was terribly disconcerting.

"One final question, Ray," the interviewer said. "With such an outstanding academic record, why aren't you going on to graduate study?"

Ray Timmins shifted slightly in the chair, but it was a calculated, comfortable move, not one due to the nervousness of a young job applicant. "It's too easy for me. I'd like to get out in the world where the real challenges are."

The interviewer raised his eyebrows in surprise. This Timmins was awfully sure of himself. "And you think you see such challenges in the Foreign Service?"

"Yes. I've decided to bring peace to the world."

The interviewer almost laughed out loud at the boyish idealism. He himself knew better; one year in the real world would change Ray Timmins' mind. Nevertheless, he made the notation, "Recommend for hiring as translator, GS-5, Department of State."

The river flows along, eternal. It laps patiently at the cement banks it will one day wear down. On both sides, lights twinkle and glow, cheap imitations of the stars.

Ray Timmins stands at the center of the bridge and gazes out over the dark water. The river is muddied and filled with indiscernible items of garbage. Very few cars go past him, crossing the bridge.

There is a mewling to his left, and he turns his head to look. It is the same gray cat that he had helped in the alley; apparently, it has followed him. "What's the matter?" Ray asks. "Need another garbage can opened?"

The cat pauses, crouches, leaps onto the rail next to Ray's arm. "That's the whole trouble," Ray explains. "It's the same trouble with everybody. I open their garbage cans, help them a little, but they're too blind to even know it. I've given them their dream of the ages, universal peace. They should be dancing in the streets. But do they thank me? No. They just accept it without a word. Why should I go on helping fools?"

"See that?" He waves his arm before him in a broad gesture. "That's all mine, if I want it. The whole world. All I have to do is say the word. I give it to you, cat. It's not worth the upkeep."

He pauses. "But it's no good just living for myself, either. I've tried it. It gets boring very quickly. So I gave myself a challenge: bring peace to the world. It kept the boredom away. For six whole years. But what now? That's a hard act to follow."

"If only it weren't so damned lonely," he says, and his eyes contain a bitter hint of self-pity. "If there were only someone to talk to, someone like me. But

there isn't. The only reason I can talk to you is that you're just a mirror. If you could speak, I'd find you as obnoxious as the rest of them."

He pulls himself up onto the rail, swings his feet around, and lets them dangle over the river sixty feet below. "So you tell me what I should do, cat. Tell me why I shouldn't just jump into the water down there and not come up again. Give me one good reason."

His hand strokes the matted gray fur of the cat's back.

His career started simply enough—a trade mission to Latin America. It was much more successful than had been expected, and the young translator was rated highly by his superiors.

Consequently, his next assignment was a bit trickier. An American citizen had inadvertently run afoul of some basic Moslem proscriptions in Iraq. Tempers were growing short and the incident threatened to assume international proportions until a diplomatic team—with Ray Timmins as one of its translators—appeared. The situation resolved itself almost immediately, in a solution that was satisfactory to all sides.

Wherever Ray was assigned, tensions began to ease. Nations that had been shooting at each other of decades suddenly came to amicable terms when Ray did the translating. The more important diplomats started asking for him at the more important conferences. He roamed the world, and problems seemed a little more solvable wherever he went. Until, at last, there was the Treaty.

By now, the Peace Conference is over and the diplomats and politicians are all shaking hands and congratulating themselves.

The cat licks stupidly at Ray's hand as the man continues to stare down into the murky water, trying to find some way out of his own private night. "Why me?" he whispers softly. "I didn't ask for it. I don't want it. Why did it have to be me?"

But no answers come to him from the river.

"You know, cat, the Chinese used to believe that if you saved a person's life, you were responsible for him from then on. I suppose that goes for saving cats and worlds as well as people. But damn! I don't want to spend the rest of my life wiping their lousy noses."

Tears roll down his cheeks, and he has to fight to keep from crying openly.

"It's not fair," he sobs. "It's just not fair."

The cat climbs up onto his lap, stands on its hind legs, and starts licking its rough tongue over his face.

Finally Ray gains control of himself again. He looks down at the river, its surface spotted by slime and garbage, oil slicks and discarded trash. "I suppose I should do something about pollution," he says at last.

And the man who single-handedly brought peace to the world picks up the alley cat and walks off the bridge, back to his apartment. ●

Stephen Goldin

Stephen Goldin was born in Philadelphia and now makes his home in Sylmar, California. He received a bachelor's degree in astronomy from UCLA, and worked for a time as a civilian space scientist for the

Navy before turning to full-time writing. He was David Gerrold's assistant editor on four original science fiction anthologies and edited an original anthology by himself (*The Alien Condition*, Ballantine,

1973). He also served for 2½ years as editor of *The Bulletin of the Science Fiction Writers of America*.

Mr. Goldin has had 15 science fiction novels published so far, including *A World Called Solitude*, *The Eternity Brigade*, *Mindflight*, *Assault on the Gods*, *Trek to Madworld* (an original *Star Trek* novel), and the popular "Family d'Alembert" series created by E.E. "Doc" Smith.

Grant Carrington

Grant Carrington works at Westinghouse as a computer programmer, a position he also held at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, the Naval Telecommunications Command, the University of Florida, and the Savannah River Ecology Lab. He has degrees in mathematics from NYU

Mr. Goldin's interests are crossword puzzles (particularly the British kind), surrealist art, collecting board games (his extensive collection now numbers well over 100), and Broadway musical cast albums. He has been likened to a koala bear. He has taught college-level courses in science fiction writing, and is married to fellow sf author Kathleen Sky.

and the University of Florida. His first novel, *Time's Fool*, will be published by Doubleday in January, 1981. It is a sequel to "Annapolis Town" and "Stella Blue," which appeared in *Amazing* while he was associate editor (1971-1974).

The Ultimate Party

All 74 billion people who once inhabited the Earth, are invited to a party. The invitations state 8 p.m., and to my surprise give my apartment as the place. The dress is casual. They all arrive within a couple of hours of each other. But the party's a bomb. There is very little food, no space, and the various languages present a communications problem. After a while tempers grow short and fights break out. One in the kitchen is unusually violent for a party and a man is stabbed. He turns out to be the first man. He dies. In turn everyone else disappears in order of birth, dating back almost 3 million years. This takes some time, and goes on well into the middle of the night. Finally I am left alone with 74 billion cups and glasses to clean. I put it off until morning.

—Peter Payack

from The Growth of Human Ideas by Peter Payack



Ralph Roberts

the flim-flam alien

Emmylou Goforth slapped a beer down in front of Billy Bumpus. She waited impatiently, one hand on hip, while Billy fumbled out his electronic funds transfer card and passed it over. Willie Nelson's great-grandson was wailing a soulful country ballad on the bar's tiny holostage. Billy couldn't recall the good ol' boy's name at the moment. But he was sure 'nuff toe-tapping good.

"Thank ya, sweetheart," he said when she returned the card, his eyes roved over her lush figure as he raised the foaming stein to his mouth. "What da ya say me and you..."

"Shut your trap, Billy Bumpus," Emmylou responded. "If you was the last man on three planets, I'd become a nun."

"Bull. You ain't even Catholic," was Billy's good-natured rejoinder. As Emmylou moved down the bar to another customer, Billy rotated on his stool and surveyed the action in Goforth's Goodtime Bar. There weren't none, he quickly concluded. A few solitary drinkers sat here and there, nursing their Yellow Ribbon beers and enjoying the bar's cool relief from the blazing Southern sun outside.

Emmylou had come back up opposite where Billy leaned his elbows on the genuine imitation-wood bar. "Billy," she said quietly, tilting her blond head toward the door. "Here comes that dirty ol' Ferd Harris. Yo' throw that drunk out if he starts making trouble. Hear?"

"Heck, Emmylou. Ol' Ferd's all right. I'll buy him a beer." He stood up and waved at the old fellow. "Over here, hoss. Been wanting ta talk with you, boy."

Illustrated by Dell Harris

Ferd grinned, his wrinkled old face looking to crack even in the dim light of Emmylou's place. He shambled over and sunk onto the stool next to Billy Bumpus. He was clenching and unclenching his knarled hands. Over and over. Kinda nervously. "Why thankee, Billy-boy," he said in his quavering old voice. "Believe I will." And he snatched up the beer Emmylou placed before him, draining half of it in one of his few graceful or quick moves. "Hiya, Emmylou."

"Listen, Ferd. I don't want no hassle from yo' to..." Her voice trailed off funny-like and her admonition ended up in a sweet-sad smile that enhanced her already considerable beauty.

Billy shook his head in bafflement. Emmylou looked downright friendly. Usually she wouldn't give ol' Ferdie a second glance. "Hey, Emmylou," he started.

"Clam up, Billy Bumpus," she said in a distracted manner and sashshayed off to serve up beer to some of the boys what had run dry down the bar.

Ferd grinned and took another sip of his brew. "Be seventy-five next month, Billy," he said proudly.

"Uh huh," Billy said absently. He was still trying to figure just what in the cotton-picking heck had gotten into Emmylou. She just purely didn't like Ferd atall up to now. Plain didn't make sense. Besides, he always ignored Ferd's divulging of his age. The ol' fellow was gonna be seventy-five the very next month for twelve months a year, every single year since Billy had known the old geezer. Sure did get him a bunch of free beers from strangers passing through.

"Listen here, Billy Bumpus," Ferd said, while leaning over confidential like so's they couldn't be heard. Which was kinda silly seeing there weren't anybody within twenty feet. "I done met me up with a real, honest-to-goodness alien. Me and that old boy sure 'nuff done us some trading, too." Ferdie's time and drink-ravaged face took on a sly, triumphant look. He was still opening and closing his hand; the one not holding his Yellow Ribbon beer, that is.

Billy felt sudden concern for his friend. "They ain't no aliens in Howard County. Just what did this here creature look like, Ferdie?"

Ferdie blinked bloodshot eyes at Billy's disbelief. "Why, he looked just like me and you, son. Said he's from a mighty far piece away though. Done forget how he named it."

Shaking his head, Billy sighed. Did appear that Ferd Harris had done been taken in by a no-good, low-down flim-flam man a passing through Howard County. "Ferdie," he said sadly. "Now you watch holovision more then 'bout anybody in this here town. You know them NASA boys done only discovered two other intelligent races. So's either your alien woulda been like a great big ol' purple snake with tentacles growing outa his head like them Varrexians or he's gonna be like one o' them little green blobs they found out Vega way. He ain't gonna look like me an' you unless he's some damnyankee flim-flammer. Mark my words."

Old Ferd Harris had a disgusted expression on his face. "You gotta be stupid, Billy-boy. I was a flim-flamming con artist before your pappy was born. This here fellow was a true enough visitor from another world. You hear me boy?"

"Yeah, yeah," Billy said resignedly. "What'd you give him and what'd you get."

"Well, it cost me a pretty penny, I tell ya. But I done got me three wishes." Old Ferdie grinned.

Billy Bumpus shook his head in disgust. But afore he could say anything, Emmylou had set two more tall, frosted mugs of Yellow Ribbon beer in front of them. "On the house," she muttered as though it hurt. Billy was startled to say the least. Ol' Emmylou flat didn't give drinks on the house. What the ever-loving heck had gotten into her. Everybody was acting purely weird today.

"Ferdie just got hisself flim-flammed," Billy told Emmylou.

Emmylou seemed to be coming back to her senses. She was looking kinda regretful-like at the two free beers. A frown crossed her face. "Ferdie, you old fool. You know better than to..." But all of a sudden, a misty expression came to her face and she just smiled at old Ferdie again and drifted off down the bar.

"Migawd," said Billy Bumpus. "Is this here world coming to an end?" He shrugged and turned on Ferd once more. "All right. Lay it out. What'd you give up? You ain't got nothin' worth a dang but your medals from the Persian Wars and that used holovision I fixed up for ya."

"That's what I had ta give," said Ferd. He did have the grace to look ashamed at trading off the holovision.

Billy gave a sigh and took a healthy swig of his beer. Why'd free beer always taste so cotton-pickin' good? "What three wishes?" he asked resignedly.

Ferd clunked down his beer mug and held up both hands, opening and closing them several times for Billy's benefit. "He give me some little pills that done cured my rheumatize."

Billy grimaced. "Ferd there must be twenty or thirty medicines available down to the drugstore that'll do the same thing. What was the second one?" He shook his head at his friend's gullability. Not only was old Ferdie not playing with a full deck, so to speak, but he had done lost several cards.

"Did too, cure my rheumatize," Ferd asserted. "Second thing now is he give me the power to turn copper into gold. Now that is gonna be mighty handy seeing as how gold is a selling for two thousand an ounce these here days."

"Have you tried that?" Billy asked patiently.

"Well, no. Ain't found no hunk o' copper to hand just yet."

Billy Bumpus reached into his pocket and pulled out a copper penny. "This here's my lucky piece. Don't see many of these anymore. Go ahead and change it to gold." He tossed it to the bar in front of Ferd and it rattled to a halt.

The old man picked up the coin, held it just before his face, crossed his eyes, and visibly concentrated. Billy could see that the little copper disc was being mighty obstinate; it remained a steady though corroded reddish-brown. "Don't seem to be a working," Ferd commented unnecessarily.

"Course not. You been flim-flammed, son!" Billy pucked his penny from Ferdie's shaking fingers and returned it to his pocket. "What was the third wish you asked for?"

Ferd looked somewhat disconcerted. "The first one worked," he muttered, "but not the second."

"I done told you how the scudder pulled off the first trick," growled Billy Bumpus. "He just laid some prescription pill on ya. So far, you sure ain't got your money's worth."

Ferd shoved himself to his feet. "Well, I reckon I better test ol' number

three." He shuffled down along the bar to where Emmylou Goforth was polishing up some plastic beer mugs. He beckoned her close and she leaned over the bar while Ferdie whispered something in her ear. Billy watched in amusement. Any minute now ol' Emmylou was a gonna cut loose. She didn't tolerate no hanky-pank in her bar. Specially not when she was involved.

But Billy's mouth dropped plumb wide-open in surprise cause Emmylou took off her apron, come right around the bar, and put her arm around ol' Ferdie's waist. That purely got everybody else's attention too. The bar fell silent except for the good ol' heel stomping music a coming from the holostage. Billy just couldn't understand it; what with Emmylou gazing down at the top of Ferd's white-haired old head with the kind of adoring look that every hot-blooded good ol' boy in Howard County had dreamed of at one time or another.

They started for the door and passed Billy on the way. Ol' Ferdie Harris winked slyly at him, while opening and closing his hand; the one that weren't already getting a little fresh with Emmylou. "Two outa three ain' bad, hoss," he said, his voice definitely sounding younger and stronger.

"Close up for me tonight, Billy Bumpus," Emmylou added demurely.

Ralph Roberts

I'm presently 34, single, read avidly, work ungodly hours, write whenever possible, and have been known to scratch fleas and chase cars. I spent fifteen months in Vietnam in Military Intelligence (admittedly a misnomer), worked with NASA during several of the Apollo moon shots, passed several years on the road as a traveling salesman, did product engineering on components for the Boeing 747, sold stereo equipment, and now sell

computers.

My experience with science fiction began with the discovery of Heinlein juveniles at age nine or ten. Sf has been my favorite literature since then. About two years ago, it came to me that I could write the stuff. This is my fiftieth sale (22 sf stories and 28 articles).

As to other qualifications...I drive a Volvo.

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